



静心学堂丛书

The Mindful Peace Academy Collection

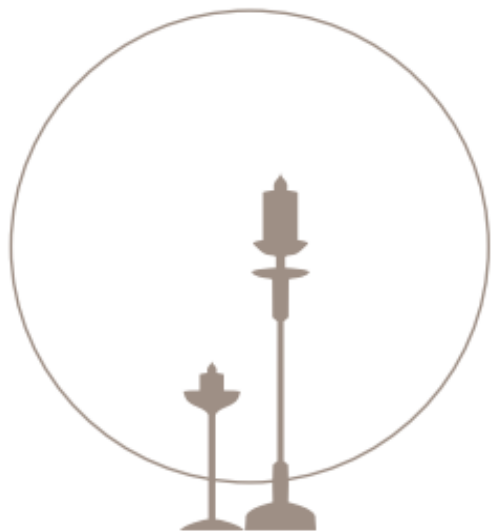
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生命的痛苦 及其解脱

Life's Suffering and Its Liberation

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著



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1993年讲于柏林禅寺第一届生活禅夏令营

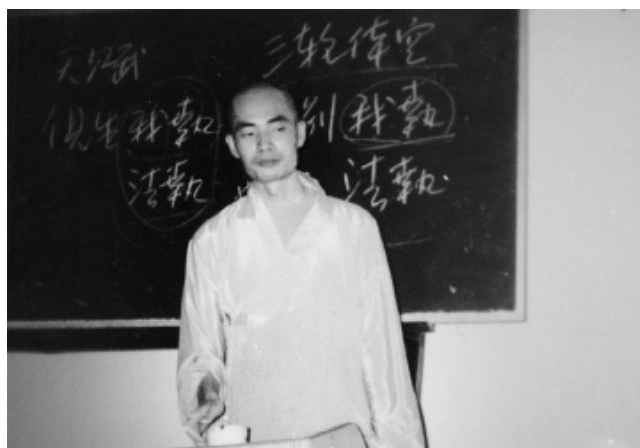
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人生，最重要的是生命，最希求的是幸福。如何才能使人生获得幸福？

古往今来，人类为探索幸福不懈努力着。遗憾的是，多数人对这个问题缺乏正确认识，只知道一味追逐财富、地位、名利、爱情……以为拥有这一切就能幸福。然而，在物质文明如此发达的今天，人们在享有丰富物质生活的同时，依然烦恼重重，痛苦不堪。原因是什么？今天，我想从佛教的观点和大家谈一谈：生命的痛苦及其解脱。



一、造成生命痛苦的原因

佛经说有情生命中有八苦交煎
即生、老、病、死、爱别离
求不得、怨憎会、五阴炽盛
佛陀要我们了解苦
不是让我们被动地接受苦
而是要我们了解痛苦产生的前因后果
从而离苦得乐

造成生命痛苦的原因是什么？这是大家非常关心的话题。如果我们就这个问题展开调查，答案往往因人而异：有人会因身体病弱，长年缠绵病榻而痛苦；有人会因衣食无着，终日操劳不休而痛苦；有人会因年龄渐长，依旧孑然一身而痛苦；有人会因感情受挫，无法排遣孤独而痛苦；有人会因希望当官，但升职无望而痛苦；有人会因生意清淡，不能发财而痛苦……各人处境不同，追求不同，对于痛苦的认识也不尽相同。

但所有这些都只是痛苦带来的现象，并不是痛苦产生的根源。若是一个人因为衣食无着而痛苦，一旦吃饱穿暖就能获得永远的幸福吗？若是一个人因为

身体欠佳而痛苦，一旦恢复健康就能获得真正的幸福吗？若是一个人因为单身而痛苦，一旦结婚成家就能获得圆满的幸福吗？若是一个人因为地位低下而痛苦，一旦官运亨通就能获得恒久的幸福吗？

如果痛苦可以通过这些现实问题得到解决，那么，世上大约不会有那么多人沉溺在痛苦中。对任何人来说，只要生命中还存在烦恼，不论物质条件如何，也不论地位高低或人生遭遇怎样，总会有这样或那样的痛苦。

我们要想活得快乐幸福，必须找到痛苦的根源，从根本上断除它。就像医生治病，必须清楚病根所在，否则头痛医头，脚痛医脚，所谓的治疗只是治标而不能治本。虽能暂时缓解病情，但病灶不除，总有复发的一天。

那么，造成生命痛苦的根源是什么？佛法告诉我们有以下几个方面。

1. 无知

“无知”二字，一般人都理解为没有知识。在今天这个信息时代，文化知识显得尤其重要，正如通常所说的那样：知识就是力量，知识就是财富。

在座的都是知识分子，对于世间知识想必不会陌生：学历史的有历史知识，学中文的有文学知识，学哲学的有哲学知识，学生物的有生物知识……掌握这些知识，可以赋予我们生存技能和相关素养，但对了解自我并没有多少切实可行的帮助。换句话说，拥有知识并不等于拥有快乐，也并不等于能远离痛苦。

那么，给生命带来痛苦的无知究竟是什么呢？

从佛法观点来看，无知就是缺乏透视宇宙人生真相的智慧。对于和我们息息相关的生命，人类几乎一无所知：我们不知道生从何来，死往何处？不知道生命的前因后果。对于自身的心灵世界，我们同样感到陌生：我们没能力把握心念，时而烦恼，时而欢乐，时而痛苦，时而狂喜……面对这些情绪的变化，我们作为当事者，常常茫然不知所措。对于生存的世界，

人类至今还缺乏足够的了解：宇宙究竟如何形成？地球究竟何时毁灭？在我们认识的事物中，何为虚妄？何为真实？从个体生命，到生命所依存的宇宙，我们的认识极其有限。我们所看到、所了解的只是沧海一粟而已。

错误的观念也是来自无知。由于我们缺乏智慧，就无法对世界和人生形成正确认识，因而颠倒黑白，产生种种错误观念。而观念是指导行为的准则，有什么样的观念，就会有什么样的人生。

对于不信因果的无神论者来说，往往会对不法行为心存侥幸，一旦果报成熟，痛苦在所难免。而对于享乐主义者来说，以为人生应该及时行乐，只知奢侈浪费，尽情挥霍。不明白福报是有定限的，就像银行存款一样，支出多少就会减去多少。同样的道理，我们这一生的福报来自前生的积累，享受一分就损失一分，如果只知挥霍，福报享尽，未来只有在穷困潦倒中度过。所以祖师教导我们：福不可以享受到尽头。假如福报尽了，幸福和快乐的源泉也就枯竭了。

迷信也是由于无知造成的。在浩瀚的宇宙面前，

在神奇的大自然面前，人类显得如此渺小和无能。正如爱因斯坦所说：“最大的秘密是宇宙的存在和它的被理解。”在人类的早期活动中，由于对宇宙人生缺乏了解，万物有灵论几乎通行于世界各民族：山有山神，树有树神，打雷有雷神，刮风有风神，下雨有雨神，掌管学业有文昌神，管辖农作有神农大帝，主持阴间有阎罗王……世间一切都在神灵的控制下，包括我们一生的吉凶祸福，也来自冥冥之中的安排。

尽管现代科学已在一定程度上对此作出了解释，使人类对世界的认识不再停留于简单的猜测和臆想，但万物有灵的影响至今不衰，依然有很多人将全部幸福寄托于对神灵的祈求和祭拜。

人类对于命运的关注，使古老的算命术至今仍大有市场。那么，命运到底有没有呢？从因果的角度来看，命运的确存在。但算命看相的准确性却很值得怀疑，它关系到操作者的心智修养及所依典籍的可靠性。很多时候，这些对运程的推算不过是蛊惑人心的游戏而已。倘若对其过分依赖，显然是不明智的。还有人迷信风水，不论是买地还是盖房都要请人勘查指点。

其实，环境的影响固然存在，但能直接影响人生的还是自身行为。事实上，命运就取决于我们造作的善恶业力，是随着我们的起心动念和所作所为变化的。

也有人说，以上这些我都不信、都不迷。可我们仔细观察一下就会发现，通常情况下，每个人都会有自己特别在乎和关注的所在，从而使心念不由自主地转向那个地方。其实，这正是我们心之所迷：贪财的是财迷，贪色的是色迷，贪权的是权迷，其他如球迷、歌迷、影迷……更是形形色色，不一而足。

总之，没有觉悟的众生难免情有钟，难免向外界攀缘。因为有所迷，就会有所执著，而执著正是痛苦的根源之一。当我们的的心沉溺于某件事物时，就会被它的种种变化所操纵，无法超然物外。财迷为了敛财绞尽脑汁，权迷为了地位费尽心机，歌迷为了偶像朝思暮想，而这些年来，中国足球的屡屡挫败，又给广大球迷带来多少失落和沮丧啊！

我们的不良习惯也来自无知。习惯是影响心态和生命品质的重要因素，甚至可以说，习惯影响着我们的生活，控制着我们的人生，左右着我们的命运。

在我们的成长过程中，培养良好习惯非常关键。可是众生由于无知，总会在不知不觉中沾染许多不良习气。有些人喜欢铺张浪费，以一掷千金来炫耀财富，结果不但折福，还引来他人的觊觎；有些人喜欢表现自己，以夸夸其谈来显示能力，结果事与愿违，导致他人的反感；有些人喜欢独断专行，以强制手段排除异己，压制他人，结果树敌众多；有些人喜欢沽名钓誉，以种种不正当手段获取虚名，结果为世人所不齿；还有些人喜欢赌博，将此视为一本万利的生意，结果不能自拔，乃至倾家荡产……

一切社会问题及犯罪现象的产生，也来自不良习惯。争斗往往从自我中心开始，盗窃往往从贪图小利开始，贪污往往从以权谋私开始，暴力往往从欺负弱小开始，诈骗往往从好逸恶劳开始……当不良习惯处于萌芽状态时，很少会引起我们的重视，但若不能及时察觉，任其发展，后果不堪设想。毒品的过患虽已人尽皆知，吸毒现象却屡禁不止。究其原因，很多吸毒者在开始时，并没有意识到这些行为已触犯法律。只是被不良习惯纵容，或是出于好奇以身试法，或是

因为空虚无聊寻求刺激，或是因为生活受挫逃避现实。却不曾想到，这种暂时的满足会带来无穷后患，使身心受到极大摧残。

除了上述种种，我们不愿让心有片刻闲暇，也属于不良习惯。世人总是习惯于忙忙碌碌，不肯将心念稍做停留。除了工作和家务之外，我们还用各种娱乐将所剩无几的业余时间打发殆尽。电视虽然在很大程度上使我们拓宽了眼界，增长了见识，丰富了文化生活，但也在无形中成为生活不可或缺的依赖，消耗了我们大量的时间。席卷全球的网络更是如此。它们在现代科技的诱人包装下，不断助长向外攀缘的心，使我们只有在外境刺激下才感到充实，一旦稍有闲暇，就觉得空虚无聊。其实，这种所谓的充实是短暂而虚假的。

真正的充实是来自内心。如果我们向内寻找，找到那个本来清净、具足万法的源头，在任何情况下都能自足，都能找到平衡，根本不需要依赖于外境。

2. 执著

由于无知，我们还会进一步产生执著。

众生的执著遍布时时处处，经论中将此称为遍计所执。“遍”是普遍，“计”是计度分别，就是对一切事物加以分别。当然这种分别是不正确的，因为它来自我们对世界的无知和错误观念。而“所执”就是我们的执著，是在虚妄分别的基础上产生执著。对于这种执著，佛教将其归纳为两类。

第一，法执

即对法的执著。说到“法”，我们通常会理解为法律或法则，而佛教所说的“法”是广义上的，包括世间的一切：不论是精神、物质的，还是有为、无为的；也不论是善良、清净的，还是丑恶、染污的……都属于“法”的范畴。

佛教中对“法”的定义为：“轨生物解，任持自性。”轨生物解，是说能使人了解它是什么；任持自性，是说法具有自身的体性和特征。如水以湿为自性，因为它拥有湿的特征；火以暖为自性，因为它拥有暖

的特征……总之，一切事物都可以从法的角度去分析。

明白了法，再说法执。众生的法执非常普遍，比如我们对名言概念的执著。其实，语言不过是后人约定俗成的符号，并非事实本身，就像我们说到“火”这个字不会烧嘴一样。但众生愚痴，总是将名言概念执为真实的存在，其中尤以对名字的执著为甚。

除了名言的执著，我们对自己的身体也呵护备至。俗话说，身体是革命的本钱。但我们的一生，与其说用身体来为学习和工作服务，不如说，很多时候都做了身体最忠实的奴仆：忙于它的吃，忙于它的穿，忙于它的住，忙于它的享乐，忙于满足它的种种欲望……甚至忙了几十年还嫌不够，希望能永远忙下去。在古代忙于炼制丹药，到现代又忙于病体冷冻，为了长生不老的幻想，忙出种种匪夷所思的花样，结果自然是徒劳。因为世间一切都是无常的，地球尚有毁灭的一天，何况我们脆弱的色身？佛经告诉我们：有生无不死。如果我们把色身执为永恒不变的实体，就难以面对它的衰老，面对终将来临的死亡。

我们还对色相执著不已。有不少女性，对容貌的

珍视更甚。不惜将大量时间和精力用于装修身体，涂脂抹粉，变换发型，搞得全身细胞不得安宁。其实，身体远不如我们以为的那么干净，不必说腐烂的死尸，就是青春妙龄的少女，体内又有些什么呢？皮肉下不过是骷髅般的骨架，骨架中不过是无法美化的五脏六腑，至于脏腑间的内容，更是污秽不堪。每天，我们正是带着这些自己不喜欢的内容四处走动，不但不嫌弃，还要将它们套上华丽的包装，百般珍爱。虽然这个身体“九孔常流不净”，但众生认识不到这一点，反而执身为净为常，引发许多无谓的烦恼。所以佛陀反复告诫我们，要观身不净，观身无常。

身体以外，我们还执著财富为实在。随着社会商业化的进程，金钱万能的口号已经到了肆无忌惮的地步，似乎有钱就有一切，所以一切都在向钱看。当然，生存需要一定的物质基础。但在温饱问题基本解决的今天，人们对财富的执著不但没有减轻，反而愈演愈烈。金钱被奉若神明，而挣钱则被当作生活的唯一目标。对很多人来说，拥有财富已不再是为了保障生活，而是满足贪欲的手段。可我们想过没有，积聚的财富

终将消散：窃贼会千方百计来瓜分它，儿女会心安理得地挥霍它，即使牢牢地锁在保险柜中，通货膨胀也会使它在一夜间成为精美的废纸，更不必说天灾人祸的摧毁。如果我们将财富视为永恒，无疑是在生命中埋下又一粒痛苦的种子。

执著感情也是导致痛苦的原因之一。我们向往的两情相悦一旦落入现实，总会带来这样那样的不如意：或是由于单相思带来求不得苦，或是由于天各一方带来爱别离苦，或是由于生活中的摩擦带来怨憎会苦。若是双方彼此爱慕，又会进一步希望相爱到永远。可世间是无常的，心念是无常的，不论什么样的爱情誓言，都难以经受无常的考验。世人总是将结婚成家作为人生幸福的重要组成部分，却不知这正是麻烦和牵挂的开始。

除此以外，众生的执著还有很多：对地位的执著，对事业的执著，对名誉的执著，对亲人的执著……殊不知，世间一切都是无常而虚幻的，如果我们将其妄执为有，妄执为常，就好比作茧自缚。只有充分认识到缘起的假相，认识到性空的原理，才能从根本上破

除执著。

第二，我执

我，是主宰义、常一义、不变义。

众生总觉得在自己生命中，有一个恒常不变的自我为主宰。所以时时为我着想，处处以自我为中心，一言一行都反映出强烈的自我：我喜欢，我讨厌；我爱，我恨……如果作个统计，我们一天不知要说多少个“我”字？

因为有了“我”，进而就会产生我执。

通常，我们会执名字为“我”。但凡听到自己的名字，总会引起特别关注，觉得这个名字就是我，赞叹它就是赞叹我，毁谤它就是毁谤我。其实，名字只是父母取的代号而已，并不能代表真正的“我”。否则，我们只需换个名字，就能将自己变成另一个人，而那些有别名、笔名等不同名字的人，又以什么作为“我”的象征？所以说，执名字为“我”，为之忧为之喜，实在是毫无意义的。

我们也会执身体为“我”。色身乃四大假合，其中何尝有“我”的存在？所以禅宗祖师会让人去参：

“父母未生前本来面目是什么？”在这个身体中，究竟什么代表了真正的“我”？在医学发达的今天，组成色身的许多部件都可以移植、再造，如果其中任何一部分是“我”的话，“我”的概念早已被现代医学所挑战：经历了整容手术的“我”是谁？经历了心脏移植的“我”是谁？可凡夫由于无知，将当下这个虚假的色身妄执为我，就会为了容貌的美丽或丑陋，为了身材的魁梧或矮小，为了身体的健康或衰弱而百般思量，徒寻烦恼。老子说：“吾所以有大患者，为吾有身；及吾无身，吾有何患？”这也从一个侧面反映了佛法所说的“身为苦本”的原理。

我们还执服装为“我”，格外注重外表的包装，以为全身名牌就高人一等；我们还执工作为“我”，职业不仅是谋生手段，更是处世的面子所在；我们还执地位为“我”，一旦身居要职就不可一世、趾高气扬……其实，服装、工作、地位与真正的“我”又有什么关系？当这一切发生变化时，“我”是否也会随之起起落落？

众生的执著形形色色，遍一切时，遍一切处，归

纳起来不外乎我法二执：无我执我，无常执常；执垢为净，执苦为乐……正是由于执著，带来了无尽的牵挂和烦恼，带来了种种事与愿违的痛苦。我们只有用智慧破除无明和执著，才能体会放下的自在，体会冲出樊笼的解脱。

3. 烦 恼

无知和执著之所以是生命痛苦的根源，正是因为它们会导致烦恼。烦恼不仅是痛苦的肇事者，它的本身就是痛苦。一旦感染烦恼病毒，内心的宁静就会被彻底破坏。烦恼潜伏在我们的生命中，占据着我们的心灵，不论我们走到哪里，都会把烦恼带到哪里。如果用一个词来形容，那就是——如影随形。

那么，众生的烦恼究竟有哪些呢？佛经中称有八万四千烦恼。在欲界、色界、无色界中，不同生命层次有着不同的烦恼。其中，根本烦恼为六种，它们是一切烦恼生起的土壤；随烦恼为二十种，随根本烦恼的作用而生起。我们首先来认识一下几种根本烦恼。

第一为贪心所。这是人类最常见的心理活动之一，即对自己喜欢的境界产生染著和占有之心。

当我们的心的被燃烧的贪婪占据时，就会失去对行为的制约，为满足贪欲无所不为。因为贪著财物而不择手段，因为贪著地位而结党营私，因为贪著虚名而自赞毁他，或者因为贪著而不惜践踏人格，以谄曲、奉承等手段达到目的。

贪的范围十分广泛，《成唯识论》曰：“贪于有、有具，染著为性。”“有”是三有，即欲界、色界和无色界；“有具”则是三有之因。三界的现象和招感三界现象的因缘，都是众生的贪著所在。我们贪著身体，贪著财富，贪著事业，贪著地位，贪著名誉；我们贪著美味的佳肴，贪著悦目的色彩，贪著悦耳的声音，贪著动听的恭维，贪著舒适的住宅，贪著惬意的环境……总之，我们贪著一切的一切。

贪著使我们的心的不由自主地为之牵引，产生种种挂碍。当贪著没有得到满足时，心被强烈的希求占据着、折磨着，甚至导致病态的渴望，使我们无视道德规范，无视法律约束，在贪欲驱使下胡作非为。即使

在贪著得到暂时满足后，我们的心依旧不得安宁，又会因为害怕失去这一切而陷入患得患失的恐惧中。而那些被充分鼓动起来的欲望，更会魔鬼般继续摧毁我们的理智，使我们在贪著的陷阱中越陷越深。

从个体生命来说，贪欲是烦恼的根本；而从整个人类社会来看，贪欲又是一切人为灾难的基础。贪著会给世界带来什么样的影响？

随着欲望的升级，人类正以前所未有的速度吞噬着地球有限的资源：森林被过度砍伐，矿藏被盲目开发，空气被污染，水源在变质……资源急速消耗和贪欲不断增长所形成的恶性循环，正在世界各地蔓延。仅仅几代人的时间，我们对自然的破坏已超过以往几千年的总和。今天，我们几乎是卡着大自然衰竭的脖子在索取。如果不能有效克服贪心，不能将我们的占有欲控制在合理范围，而是继续发展它，纵容它，那么要不了多少时间，我们留给子孙后代的只能是满目疮痍的大地，是不再适合人类居住的家园。

与贪表现出的占有欲相反，嗔则是对自己不喜欢的事物产生恼恨和排斥。

嗔的表现形式很多。在生活中，我们处处可以发现由于嗔恨导致的辱骂和争斗。或因意见不合，彼此恼羞成怒；或因利益冲突，彼此怒目相向……当他人对自己构成影响和伤害时，都会引起我们的嗔恨。更有甚者，还会将属于自己的过错迁怒于他人。

嗔恨会使人的内心失去平静。可我们分析一下就会发现，嗔恨实在是愚痴的表现。当我们生气时，等于“拿别人的过错惩罚自己”，使自己成为首当其冲的受害者。嗔恨又能使微小的冲突不断升级，当嗔心被付诸行动时，理智不见了，道德不见了，甚至连法律也不见了。正如佛经所说的那样：“一念嗔心起，百万障门开。”

嫉妒也来自嗔恨心。虽然人类的心灵可以比天空更广阔，但也可以狭隘到容不下自己以外的任何人。当心灵被嫉妒遮蔽时，我们容不下别人的荣耀，容不下别人的成功，容不下别人的幸福。嫉妒是一种可怕的心理，我们会出于嫉妒去诽谤他人，干扰他人，处处为他人设置障碍。我们甚至会在极端的嫉妒下，欲置他人于死地而后快，走上犯罪道路。

为了对治嫉妒，佛教特别提倡随喜的功德。当别人做慈善时，当别人精进修行时，当别人取得进步时，我们只要由衷地欢喜，真诚地赞叹，所获功德就能和对方一样。所以随喜是非常殊胜的法门，不仅能帮助我们有效克服嫉妒，还是成办世出世间功德的捷径。

慢，就是通常所说的骄傲，也是根本烦恼的重要组成部分。慢心会使我们妄自尊大，蔑视他人，对有才德者不肯谦下。慢心还会使我们我行我素，造作种种恶业。慢心有以下几种不同的表现形式：

慢：当他人能力、学问等方面确实不如自己，或与自己不相上下时，慢心重的人会自高自大，轻视他人。

过慢：当他人不论在哪方面都与自己相等，或确实超过自己时，过慢会使人故步自封，看不到他人的长处。

慢过慢：当他人不论在哪方面都远胜过自己，慢心会使人歪曲事实，仍然认为自己胜过他人，不能容忍他人所应获得的荣誉和赞叹。

我慢：五蕴和合的生命体，本是没有我的，但

我们由于妄见，总以为其中有“我”的存在。并进一步夸大自我，抬高自我，处处以自我为中心，觉得人人都该尊重我，都该听我的指挥和差遣，都该以我的意志为转移，乃至希望整个世界都围绕我和我的需要运行。

增上慢：有些人在修行过程中稍微有了一点感应和受益，就误以为自己证到了什么果位，自鸣得意，不可一世。那些因盲修瞎炼而走火入魔的人，基本都属于这种情况。

卑慢：有些人生性自卑，自甘沉沦，但对他人的长处也不以为然。不管他人有什么值得学习的地方，为了避免暴露自己的无知，全然不知谦下，不懂得尊重他人，不懂得谦虚使人进步。

邪慢：有些人并没有真正的学问和德行，但为了博取世间名利，达到不可告人的目的，通过种种虚假手段宣传自己，沽名钓誉。

俗话说“谦受益，满招损”，一个慢心重的人，不论学识还是道德修养都很难长进。因为他看不到自己存在的不足，看不到别人的长处，所以目中无人。

对别人的意见不会认真听取，对别人的学识不会虚心学习，这无疑会阻碍自己的进步。

我们常说的“文人相轻”，也是慢心造成的。大凡有特长的人，我慢总是特别重。一方面觉得自己有我慢的资本，另一方面，整天接受别人的恭敬赞叹，我慢不断得到滋养，以至产生错觉，以为自己的确就那么了不起，就那么胜人一筹。

慢心也使人与人之间难以和谐相处。一般来说，我慢重的人自尊心总是特别强，时时都希望别人尊重自己，容不得他人的轻视。由于过分看重自己，往往不能以平等心对待他人，不懂得对他人表示应有的尊重，甚至随意伤害他人。然而，人与人之间的关系是相互的。我们想得到别人的尊重，首先得尊重别人，以友好的态度对待别人。倘若做不到这一点，总是有意无意地轻视他人，对方自然也会以同样的方式反馈于你。同时，自尊心过强的人情感往往很脆弱。在他的眼中，自己有着至高无上的地位，只能适应别人的顺从，适应恭维赞美之词，一旦受到打击，精神很容易崩溃。

4. 造业

烦恼不仅是扰乱内心宁静的因素，还使有情为其所惑，造下种种恶业。

佛法把人的行为分成三种，即善的行为、恶的行为和无记的行为。其中，唯有善与恶两种行为可构成业力，并招感未来的苦乐果报。那么，善恶又是以什么作为判断标准呢？《成唯识论》的解释是：“能为此世他世顺益，故名为善……能为此世他世违损，故名不善。”由此可见，善恶行为不是以眼前利益判断的，而是贯穿了现在及未来两世，以它招感的结果来定义。

一种行为必须对现在和未来都有利益才能称为善行。比如佛教倡导的布施，就是自利利他并惠及来世的善行。通过布施可以克服自私吝啬，培养慈悲济世的博大胸怀，是现世乐；通过布施可以为将来招感无尽财富，是未来利益乐；通过布施可以积聚成佛资粮，又是法乐。

与此相反，对现在和未来都有损害的行为就属于

恶法。如杀、盗、淫、妄等伤害他人并触犯法律的行为，如果一意孤行地造作，必然会在生命中结下苦果。不仅现世要受到良心谴责，要提防他人报复，要接受法律制裁，更会在未来招受三途诸苦。当报应现前时，不论我们是否愿意，都不得不吞下自己亲手酿下的苦酒。

善恶业之外，还有无记行。所谓无记，即不能记别此种行为是善是恶。比如渴了喝几口水，饿了吃两块面包，累了躺下休息片刻，包括正当、有节制的娱乐生活，都属于无记。此外，果报也属于无记之列。比如人天的乐果，现世虽然享乐，却无法为未来带来利益，所以不能称为善。而恶趣的苦果，对现世虽有损害，却不能作用于未来，也不能称为恶。

《十善业道经》中也谈到善恶的区分标准。经中说：“言善法者，谓人天身、声闻菩提、独觉菩提、无上菩提，皆依此法以为根本而得成就，是名善法。”这是从结果比知行为的善恶。能成就世、出世间五乘果位的行为是善法。如人天乘的五戒十善，声闻乘的三十七道品，菩萨乘的六度四摄等，都是善的行为。

而能招感恶道苦报的行为，则属于不善行。

善恶行千差万别，最基本的不外乎十善行和十恶行。先说十恶行：

一、杀生：以恶心断除有情命根。具五缘成杀业道：1.故意有杀心；2.杀他有情；3.他有情想；4.作杀加行，具有杀他的一切准备；5.不是误杀。

二、不与取：也称偷盗，包括骗取、窃取、强夺、霸占、吞没等不与而取的行为。具足五缘成不与取业道：1.故意起盗心；2.对于他物；3.起他物想；4.预先有盗窃的动机准备；5.不是误取。

三、邪行：又称邪淫。具足四缘成邪行业道：1.非境，对他人的妻子或父母姐妹行淫；2.非道，于不正道行淫；3.非时，虽是自己的妻室，但在她怀孕、哺乳及斋戒期间行淫，也属于邪淫；4.非处，在寺院或佛塔边行淫。

四、虚诳语：又称妄语，包括自妄语、教他妄语、遣使妄语、书面妄语，或是通过默认、暗示、点头、手势等达到欺骗目的，都属于妄语。具足四缘成虚诳语业道：1.以违背事实的言论欺骗别人，如见言不见，

不见言见等；2. 对方理解你的意思；3. 有欺骗心理；4. 对方如实接受。

五、离间语：即挑拨离间，也称两舌。具足四缘成离间语染：1. 歪曲事实，故意挑拨离间他人的关系；2. 有心制造矛盾及挑起争斗的语言；3. 对方理解你所说的内容；4. 如实接受。

六、粗恶语：又称恶口，包括毁谤、攻击、讽刺、挖苦等尖酸刻薄、伤害他人的语言。具足四缘成粗恶语染：1. 有心伤害他人；2. 发出非爱语，如各种不文明的语言；3. 对方理解；4. 如实接受。

七、杂秽语：又称绮语。具足二缘成杂秽语染：1. 有染污心，出于个人目的而对他人恭维、谄曲；2. 所说语言属于海淫海盗，如情歌艳词、天南地北的闲谈，及知见不正的邪论等。

八、贪欲：对于他人的财富、地位、家庭等生起希求，妄想占为己有，属于贪业道。

九、嗔恚：对于有情因恼恨而起伤害之心，属于嗔业道。

十、邪见：拨无因果，不信前生后世。如唯物论

者的断见及一般宗教信奉的常见，都属于愚痴邪见。

与十恶行相反的，便是十善行，即不杀生、不不与取、不邪淫、不虚诳语、不杂秽语、不离间语、不粗恶语、不贪欲、不嗔恚、不邪见。

十善十恶都是依身口意三业造作的。杀生、不杀生，不与取、不不与取，邪淫、不邪淫，属于身业。虚诳语、不虚诳语，杂秽语、不杂秽语，离间语、不离间语，粗恶语、不粗恶语，属于口业。贪欲、不贪欲，嗔恚、不嗔恚，邪见、不邪见，属于意业。

究其本质来说，身业和口业都源于意业，是由意业的烦恼，导致身和口的不善行为。贪心会引起杀生，因为贪著肉食的美味，或是希望从杀生贩卖中牟取利润，或是在打猎围捕中寻求刺激，从而大造杀业。还有人因为贪著他人的财富，不惜造下谋财害命的极大恶业。

至于国与国之间的战争，地区与地区之间的矛盾，贪心也是始作俑者。为了吞并别国的土地，掠夺别国的资源，满足自己的勃勃野心，几千年来，世界上大大小小的战争此起彼伏，发展到今天，更以核武器彼

此威胁，给人类和平埋下极大隐患。

贪心会引发偷盗。犯罪分子之所以无视法律，不择手段地盗窃他人财产，正是出于贪心。贪心会引起邪淫，因为彼此贪爱，才会失去理智，发生不正当关系。贪心会引起妄语。人们常说“无商不奸”，是不是商人生来就不诚实？究其根源，无非是贪心驱使，为了牟取暴利，才不惜弄虚作假，欺骗他人。贪心虽然是意业，一旦发作，却能进一步影响身业和口业。

同样，嗔心也能导致种种恶业。嗔心会引起杀生。嗔心使人人与人之间不能和平相处，因为种种原因发生争斗。一个愤怒的人是很难保持理智的，随着嗔心炽盛，争斗会进一步升级，甚至拔刀相见，轻者受伤，重者一命呜呼。

嗔心会引起偷盗。因为嫉妒别人的富有，就想设法地明抢暗偷，据为己有。嗔心会引起邪淫。在今天这个充满暴力的社会，因嗔心带来的犯罪现象比比皆是，使很多无辜的女性遭受摧残。嗔心会引起妄语。对于我们不喜欢或有过冲突的人，我们时常会隐瞒真相，故意欺骗。对生意场上的竞争对手，更不会以诚

相待，甚至故意制造骗局让对方遭受损失。

因果报应，丝毫不爽。只要是我們造作的业力，不论大小轻重，终将招感果报。但由因感果的过程中还取决于缘的助力，即外在条件的推动。只有当因和缘都具足之后，业果才能成熟。所以业力又分为四种：

现报业，现生就要受报的业力；

生报业，来生才会受报的业力；

后报业，来生乃至更多生才受报的业力；

不定报业，尚有转机的业力，受报时间和报应轻重都没有完全确定。

在现实中，许多人因为不明白三世因果的道理，常常怨恨上天不长眼睛。其实，果报成熟和种子生长一样，需要有依附的土壤，需要阳光雨露的滋润，还需要一定的过程和时间。

5. 苦 果

我们现有的生命形式及处境，是往昔业力所招感的。而我们造作的业力，不论善恶都是有漏的，由此所得的果报也就充满缺陷和痛苦。

佛经说有情生命中有八苦交煎，即生、老、病、死、爱别离、求不得、怨憎会、五阴炽盛。这些苦或来自心理，如五阴炽盛带来的种种烦恼；或来自身体，如生老病死；或来自人际关系，如爱别离、求不得诸苦；或来自外境，如因地、水、火、风增盛而引起的自然灾害……

佛陀要我们了解苦，不是让我们被动地接受苦，而是要我们了解痛苦产生的前因后果，从而离苦得乐。

有的人短命或多病，那是因为过去杀生所致，使动物因你而不得善终，或因你而倍受虐待，生不如死，所以他们在今生会遭受相应的苦果。有的人一生贫困潦倒，处处碰壁，同样是经商，却总是不能赚钱，那是因为过去悭贪吝啬的结果。一个人的富贵取决于福报，而福报又来自布施，有一分耕耘才有一分收获。

倘若前生未能培福，就不能怨天尤人了。有的人相貌丑陋，人见人嫌，那是因为嗔心太重的缘故。世界上最难看的表情，就是人愤怒时那张扭曲的脸。所以经常起嗔心的人，会导致丑陋的果报。有的人人际关系不和谐，那是过去曾种下两舌的因，以挑拨离间破坏他人的友好关系，所以今生就得不到和谐的环境，得不到他人的真诚相待。有的人配偶不忠，家庭破裂，那是过去生邪淫的结果。有的人地位卑下，受人轻贱，那是我慢太重的结果。

此外还可以举出很多例子。总之，世间任何现象都有其前因后果，有特定的发展规律。明白了因果法则，我们就要以此为生活指南和行为标准。勿以善小而不为，勿以恶小而为之，这才是对自己，也是对未来生命负责的态度。

二、获得幸福的方法

如果我们不能对自己有清醒的认识
就不能把握心念
不能在烦恼生起的当下观照它，断除它
如果我们想从痛苦中解脱
首先得认识自己
如何才能认识自己
祖师告诉我们
直下承担就是认识自己

什么是幸福？怎样才能获得幸福？对于这个问题，每个人的回答各不相同：有的人以家财万贯为幸福，有的人以学识渊博为幸福，有的人以身居要职为幸福，有的人以两情相悦为幸福，有的人以事业有成为幸福，有的人以健康长寿为幸福……

所有这些，就是幸福的全部内容吗？

如果幸福是这样，那些拥有亿万资产的富翁们应当感到幸福，可他们中的很多人，虽然有着巨额的家产，庞大的事业，依然无法摆脱痛苦，活得烦恼不堪；那些地位显赫的政要也应当感到幸福，可处在权力旋涡中的他们，时而不可一世，时而被群起攻之，又何尝有幸福可言？那些琴瑟和谐的佳偶也应当感到

幸福，可天下没有不散的宴席，无常到来时，至爱的亲人终将撒手西归，各奔前程……

世人追求的这些幸福，在佛法看来都是有漏的。漏是烦恼义，也就是说，世间所谓的幸福总是蕴含着烦恼。一个拥有事业的人，会被事业占据整个身心，终日为其操劳；一个身居高位的人，既没有言行自由，又没有随意支配的时间，还要担心别人算计，担心失去地位，甚至不得不因此违背自己的良心。我们是否想过，拥有地位和事业的幸福究竟在哪里？

那么，如何才能获得真正的幸福？佛法告诉我们，要做到以下几个方面。

1. 树立正确的认识

众生流转生死的根源是无明，所以正见才是解脱痛苦之本。我们要解脱生死，获得幸福，首先要树立正确的世界观和人生观。

什么是正确的认识？

第一，相信因果

“因果”二字大家都很熟悉，但认识并深信因果，却不是容易的事。通常，我们总是将因果简单理解为“种瓜得瓜，种豆得豆”。可佛法告诉我们：众生业力不可思议，果报亦不可思议。作为万物存在的基本规律，因果法则远非我们以为的那么机械而单一。

认识因果，首先要相信有善有恶，明确什么是善的行为，什么是恶的行为；其次要相信有业有报，即善的行为形成善业，恶的行为形成恶业，所谓“善恶到头终有报，只争来早与来迟”；第三，要相信有前生后世，生命是相续不断的，今生仅仅是其中一个环节，它还有着无穷的和无尽的未来，而因果正是贯穿其中并连接三世的纽带；最后还要相信有圣有凡，即生命层次有高低之分。生命是能改造的，它既会因为道德净化而升华，也会因为烦恼炽盛而堕落。正因为命运具有可塑性，我们付出的努力才有价值。倘若生命不能转化，不会延续，那么不论流芳千古还是遗臭万年，究竟有什么不同？

因果揭示了生命延续的规则。但对于不信因果的

人来说，眼前利益是至高无上的，他们不会进一步考虑未来果报。只有在正确认识因果的前提下，我们的眼光才会更长远，才能通过积极努力来改造命运。

如果我们希望未来生命中拥有财富，现在就应该广修布施。因为享乐是对福报的消耗，布施才是对福田的耕耘。只有播种才能收获，同样，只有布施才能带来富贵的果报，所以施比受更有福。

假如我们希望长寿，就要珍惜一切众生的生命，不仅慈悲不杀，还要积极地放生、护生；假如我们希望相貌庄严，就要培养忍辱之心，不论冤亲都和颜相向；假如我们希望人际关系和谐，就要消除嫉妒，以友好的心态与人相处，对他人的困难主动帮助，对他人的荣誉随喜赞叹；假如我们希望出身高贵，就要恭敬父母，恭敬师长，恭敬有德之人，同时不轻视地位卑贱的人，对所有人一视同仁。

第二，相信无常

众生正是由于对“常”的执著，才给自己带来巨大的痛苦。想要解脱烦恼和痛苦，必须正见无常的

本质。经曰“诸行无常，是生灭法”，就是告诉我们，一切有为法都不能逃脱生灭变化的规律。

心念是无常的。我们现前的喜怒哀乐，包括任何一种心态，除了内在原因，还要受到客观条件的影响。尤其是凡夫，总是心随境转。当外境发生变化，心态也会随之变化。就如大海，时而风平浪静，时而波涛汹涌；如虚空，时而万里无云，时而阴云密布……

身体是无常的。从我们拥有这个色身开始，无时不在经受无常的考验。因为无常，我们才能从父母所给的那点物质长成现在这个色身；因为无常，我们才会从朝气蓬勃的青年一天天走向衰老；因为无常，我们健壮的色身才会受到疾病威胁，随时都有病变乃至死亡的可能。因此，佛陀在《四十二章经》中告诫弟子们说：人命只在呼吸之间。

国家和社会是无常的。《三国演义》开宗明义：“话说天下大势，分久必合，合久必分。”说的就是这个道理。翻开中国古代史，我们可以看到，历史正是沿着无常的规律发展而来：周末七国纷争，并入于秦；秦灭之后，楚汉分争，并入于汉；汉末三国兴起，

晋朝统一；晋灭之后，南北纷争，隋唐统一……这些朝代少则几十年，多则几百年，但都经历了兴起、延续、灭亡的过程。无常使任何朝代都无法永远存在，使社会由繁荣走向衰败，所谓盛极而衰。秦始皇一统天下，但他幻想的千秋大业不过传了两代而已。从另一个角度，无常也促进了社会的进步发展，正是因为无常，人类才能从原始社会进入奴隶社会、封建社会、资本主义社会、社会主义社会，乃至像我们希望的那样，最终进入共产主义社会。

我们孜孜以求的财富也是无常的。许多人喜欢积聚财富，为此想尽办法，甚至采用不正当手段敛财。他们不但希望自己受用，还希望传于后代，使子子孙孙都能享用不尽。殊不知，财富同样要受到无常规律的支配。佛经说，财富为五家所有：大水可以冲走财富，大火可以烧毁财富，黑势力可以抢去财富，官府可以没收财富。如果这些都没能使你受损，那么富贵之家往往会有不肖子孙，他们不懂得钱财来之不易，任意挥霍，将祖先的辛苦积聚迅速败尽。俗话说“富不过三代”，纵观历史，的确很难有一个家族能保持

永远的富贵。

我们所处的世界也是无常的。几千年来，人类一直竭力发展科技，建设世界，使我们从愚昧落后进化到今天的高度文明。无常使世界进步发达，也使文明最终走向毁灭。因为我们赖以生存的地球要经历成、住、坏、空的过程，当它趋于毁灭时，文明还能继续存在吗？皮之不存，毛将焉附？

第三，相信缘起性空

缘起是佛法的核心思想，贯穿于整个教义。佛教的因果观之所以不同于宿命论者的机械因果论，也是因为它建立在缘起基础上，因需要在缘的推动下才会结果。无常也是同样，因为万物是众缘和合的，所以才会处于无常变化中。缘起又是宇宙万物的发展规律。《中论》曰：“未曾有一法，不从因缘生。”世间万物既不是神造的，也不是偶然有的，离开因缘就没有这一切。

缘起主要包括四缘，分别是因缘、增上缘、所缘缘、等无间缘，所谓“四缘生诸法”。

因缘：是事物生起的直接条件。比如我们在土壤中播下一颗种子，这就是亲因缘。

增上缘：是推动事物成长的外在条件，比如种子需要土地、水分、人工、阳光等成长条件，这些是增上缘。

所缘缘：即所缘的外境，是心法生起的缘。比如眼识生起要有色境，耳识生起要有声境，色声之境就是所缘缘，是心识生起的重要条件。

等无间缘：心念如流水般相似相续，一念接着一念。在心识活动中，不可能同时出现两个不同的念头，必须待前念过去后，后念才能随之生起。而前念就是后念生起的等无间缘。

一切事物无不是缘起的。比如眼前这张桌子，是由铁钉、木头、油漆、木工等因缘和合而成。我们的身体是五蕴和合的，其中色蕴为物质，即眼根、耳根、鼻根、舌根、身根，而受想行识则是各种心理活动，并以识蕴为精神主体。精神活动同样需要众多因缘的成就，如眼识的生起要具足九缘，即光线、空间、色境、注意、种子、俱有依（根身）、分别依（意识）、

染净依（末那识）、根本依（阿赖耶识）。只有这九缘都具备，眼识才能生起。

由此我们可以了解到：小到心识的生起，大到整个宇宙，都是众缘和合而成的。佛陀让我们用缘起法观察世界，是要求我们透过缘起现象通达空性。在三论宗的根本论典《中论》里，有这样一个偈颂：“众因缘生法，我说即是无，亦为是假名，亦是中道义。”

为什么因缘所生法是空的？是因为它没有自性。所谓自性，即不由因缘、固定不变的自体。比如前面所说的桌子，是由人工、木材、铁钉等条件组成。离开这些条件，桌子是什么？而其中的木材，也是地水火风等元素的组合。离开这些元素，木材是什么？人是五蕴的假合，离开五蕴，人又是什么？

由此可见，缘起法没有固定不变的实质，缘起的当下就是性空。但我们还要认识到，性空并不否定现象。我们不仅要认识到事物的本性是空，也要认识到假相宛然，这才是符合中道的认识。

在般若经典中，处处要求我们以中观思想去观察一切。《心经》曰：“观自在菩萨行深般若波罗蜜多时，

照见五蕴皆空，度一切苦厄。舍利子！色不异空，空不异色，色即是空，空即是色。”

这段经文主要告诉我们：缘起与性空不二。这也是佛菩萨以智慧对宇宙人生所作的透视。“色即是空，空即是色”，是说缘起有与自性空为一体。很多人对佛法所说的“空”认识不足，或以为空在色外，或以为色灭才空，因而对空产生种种误解。事实上，佛法所说的“空”是建立在缘起有的当下，不可以离开缘起有去寻找另外的空性。“度一切苦厄”，是说我们只有认识到这个道理，才能度脱种种烦恼。

2. 不住于相

众生因为住于虚妄相而起烦恼，并由此造业，导致种种痛苦。如果想要从中解脱，必须断除对一切假相的执著。如何才能做到这一点呢？

首先要以智慧透视一切，认识到因果和无常的规律，认识到空性了不可得。只有洞悉事物真相，我们才不会被它的假相所迷惑，从而避免贪嗔痴，避免由

执著带来的痛苦。

在我们熟悉的《金刚经》中，须菩提请教佛陀：“善男子善女人，发阿耨多罗三藐三菩提心，应云何住？云何降伏其心？”整部《金刚经》都在回答这两个问题。应云何住，即修行者的心应该如何安住；云何降伏其心，即通过什么方法来降伏我们的心。

佛陀对这个问题的回答是——“无住生心”。无住，就是不住于相。

菩萨在修布施时要不住于相：“应无所住行于布施，所谓不住色布施，不住声香味触法布施。”否则会如何呢？“若菩萨心住于法而行布施，如人入暗则无所见。若菩萨心不住法而行布施，如人有目，日光明照，见种种色。”不住相布施，就是在修布施时观三轮体空，不住于能施的我相、受施的他相及所施的物相。如果在布施时心有所住，则布施有限，功德也有限；布施时心无所住，则布施无限，功德也像虚空般不可思量。

菩萨在度众生时也要不住于相。“所有一切众生之类，若卵生，若胎生，若湿生，若化生；若有色，

若无色；若有想，若无想，若非有想非无想，我皆令人无余涅槃而灭度之。如是灭度无量无数无边众生，实无众生得灭度者。何以故？若菩萨有我相、人相、众生相、寿者相，即非菩萨。”菩萨广度一切众生，却不可住于度生相，不可有能度的我相，所度的众生相。如果菩萨在度生时有我相、众生相，就没资格称为菩萨。

在学佛过程中也要不住于相。“何以故？是诸众生若心取相，则为著我、人、众生、寿者；若取法相，即著我、人、众生、寿者；若取非法相，即著我、人、众生、寿者。是故不应取法，不应取非法。以是义故，如来常说：汝等比丘，知我说法，如筏喻者。法尚应舍，何况非法？”通常，人们在学佛前会住于世间相，学佛后又执著佛法。其实只要是住相，一样会成为修道的障碍。就像落进眼中的金子与沙子，对眼睛会构成同样的危害。所以学佛既不能住于世间相，也不能住于佛法。

在修证过程中，同样要不住于相。须陀洹没有得须陀洹果的相，斯陀含没有得斯陀含果的相，阿那含

没有得阿那含果的相，阿罗汉也没有证悟阿罗汉果的相。如果阿罗汉认为我得阿罗汉果，就是有我、人、众生、寿者相。《金刚经》说：“须菩提！我于阿耨多罗三藐三菩提，乃至无有少法可得。”须陀洹等四果位是声闻行者的修证目标，阿耨多罗三藐三菩提是无上佛果。三乘行者在修证过程中，以般若智慧证诸法实相，能所双亡，无智无得。如果取相妄生分别，早就和真理不相应了。

《金刚经》中处处都在提醒我们不住于相。“凡所有相，皆是虚妄”“离一切诸相，即名诸佛”“实相者即是非相”“于一切法应如是知，如是见，如是信解，不生法相”“若以色见我，以音声求我，是人行邪道，不能见如来”……要证悟实相，必须以般若观照一切：“如来身相者，即非身相”“庄严佛土者，即非庄严，是名庄严”“如来说三十二相，即是非相，是名三十二相”“所言众生者，即非众生，是名众生”……从而达到无住生心的效果。

禅宗传至五祖，开始以《金刚经》作为修证指南。其后，六祖也是因为听闻“应无所住而生其心”大彻

大悟。他的得法偈“菩提本无树，明镜亦非台，本来无一物，何处惹尘埃”，正体现了般若无相的道理。六祖的《坛经》，也是以无住的修行教授后学。对于烦恼与菩提的区别，祖曰：“前念著境即烦恼，后念离境即菩提。”烦恼与菩提仅在著境与离境的一念之差，住相就是烦恼，不住相则是菩提。

对于见性成佛，祖曰：“世人有八万四千尘劳，若无尘劳，智慧常现，不离自性。悟此法者，即是无念，无忆无著，不起逛妄。用自真如性，以智慧观照，于一切法不取不舍，即是见性成佛道。”又说：“若开悟顿教，不执外修，但于自心常起正见，烦恼尘劳常不能染，即是见性。”佛性每个人本自具足，只因烦恼尘劳不得显现，倘若不住于相，佛性便能显现。

对于佛法修证，六祖同样以无住生心概括了禅宗的三大要领：“我此法门从上以来，先立无念为宗，无相为体，无住为本。”无念者，对一切境界心不染著，是为无念；无相者，实相无相，行者要能离一切相，不取一切相，才能证悟清净法性；无住者，在念念中不思前境，在诸法上念念不住，心不住境，是为

无住。

在具体修行方法上，禅宗也体现出与其他宗派的差异。参禅打坐向来都强调坐姿，而六祖却呵斥坐相，《坛经》曰：“道须通流，何以却滞；心不住法，道即通流；心若住法，名为自缚。若言常坐不动是，只如舍利弗宴坐林中却被维摩诘呵。善知识，又有人教坐，看心观静，不动不起，从此置功。迷人不会，便执成颠，如此者众。如是相教，故知大错。”道是由无住生心才能证悟，如果执著坐相，势必不能证悟大道，所谓“生来坐不卧，死去卧不坐，一具臭骨头，何为立功课”。

六祖门下的南岳怀让也对一味枯坐不以为然。马祖道一在南岳坐禅，怀让禅师知道他是法器，便前去相问：“大德坐禅图什么？”道一说：“图作佛。”怀让就拿砖在他面前磨，道一诧异：“磨作什么？”怀让说：“磨作镜。”道一不解：“磨砖岂能成镜？”怀让说：“磨砖不能作镜，坐禅又岂能成佛？”道一又问：“那应该怎么办？”怀让说：“如牛驾车，假如车不驶，应该打车还是打牛？同样，你希望通过坐禅

成佛，可是禅非坐卧，佛无定相，于无住法，不应取舍。如果执于坐相，不仅不能通达禅，且永远都不能成佛。”

参禅修道时更不能心有所住。禅宗兴起之前，教界流行的小乘禅观都是系心于境，而禅宗认为坐禅要心无所住。《坛经》说：“此门坐禅，元不著心，亦不著净，亦不是不动。”如果著心，可心本是虚妄的，知道心的幻化，有什么好著呢？倘若著净，菩提自性本来清静，只因妄想覆盖真如，才显得不清净。如果执著净相，本身就是一种妄想。

六祖接引怀让禅师时，怀让礼祖，六祖问：“何处来？”怀让曰：“嵩山。”祖问：“什么物，恁么来？”怀让曰：“说似一物即不中。”六祖问：“还可修证否？”怀让曰：“修证即不无，染污即不得。”六祖说：“就是这个不染污的东西，诸佛之所护念。汝即如是，我也如是。”这个公案说明，修道要保有一颗不染污的心，不住于任何相。

禅师之间也相互检验彼此是否住相。赵州游天台，路遇寒山，见道边有牛脚印，寒山说：“你看到

牛了吗？”赵州说：“不识。”寒山指着牛脚迹说：“这是五百罗汉游山留下的。”赵州说：“既然是罗汉，怎会留下牛脚迹呢？”寒山说：“苍天苍天。”赵州呵呵大笑，寒山问：“你笑什么？”赵州说：“苍天苍天。”如果从常人眼光去看，这段对话似乎不近人情，可它显示了道人与常人之不同。常人著相，牛脚迹是牛脚迹，罗汉脚迹是罗汉脚迹，而禅者处处以本分事相见。在法性上，牛脚迹就是罗汉脚迹，罗汉脚迹就是牛脚迹。

生活中，禅者们同样不取不舍，不住于相。慧休禅师三十年着一双鞋；大梅法常禅师不吃锄下之菜；左溪玄朗常行头陀，居住石岩间，一件袈裟穿了四十多年；通慧禅师入太白山，不带粮草，居于树下，饿食树果，渴饮泉水，布衲终身不换；智则禅师性格不羁，屋内除了床单、瓦钵、木匙外一无所有，房门从不关闭……

禅者的修道就落实在简朴的生活中，落实在平凡的日常作务中，从吃饭、穿衣中体会道，从采茶、砍柴中体会道。他们将物欲降低到最低限度，却从修行

中获得了无限的法喜。当你请教禅师们如何修道时，他会告诉你：吃饭、睡觉、喝茶……但禅者的吃饭、穿衣不同于我们。凡人吃饭不好好吃，挑挑拣拣；睡觉不好好睡，百般思量，辗转反侧。而禅者吃不住吃相，穿不住穿相，处处随缘，处处自在。

不住于相才能解脱生命的痛苦。《心经》告诉我们：要用般若智观照一切，认识到万物了不可得，就能心无挂碍，无挂碍就无恐怖，从而远离颠倒梦想，究竟涅槃。涅槃是烦恼的彻底息灭，只有证悟涅槃，生命才能真正解脱。

3. 息灭妄想

很多人把痛苦归之于客观环境，如身体欠安、生活清贫、世道不公等。其实这些只是造成痛苦的外因，而它的真正根源是来自于心。我们内心充满种种妄想，即前面所说的错误观念、迷信、执著、贪嗔邪见等。正是这些妄想，使内心失去平静，使我们陷入永无止境的追逐，寻求各种刺激，甚至胡作非为。要解脱痛

苦，必须息灭妄想。

如何才能息灭妄想？经常听很多初学禅修的人说：打坐时妄想太多，静不下来，有什么办法可以对治？办法当然有，但我们必须先考察一下：为什么会这些妄想？心念是相续的，如果想在坐禅时心无旁骛，生活中就要时刻注意用心。打坐时出现得最频繁、最强烈的妄想，必定是我们平时最执著的。想要禅修得力，生活中就要心无所住，对一切境界如雁过长空，风吹竹叶，不留痕迹。心清净了，打坐时自然不会妄想联翩。

念佛也能息灭妄想。人们往往将念佛误以为老婆婆专修的法门，或以为念佛是在求佛。有个故事说，一位老婆婆整天念佛，小孙子听得很厌烦，于是就“奶奶，奶奶”地叫个不停。老婆婆嫌吵：没完没了地叫什么？孙子说：我叫了几声你就烦，可你总是不停地念佛，佛难道就不烦吗？故事中小孙子的看法，代表了许多人对念佛的误解。事实上，念佛是为了调御心态，息灭妄想，所谓“清珠投于浊水，浊水不得不清；佛号注入妄心，妄心不得不佛”。正如《大势

至《菩萨圆通章》所说：“都摄六根，净念相继，得三摩地，斯为第一。”可见，念佛也是对治妄想的良方。

止观能息灭妄想。止，梵语奢摩他，意为止息散乱，制心一处；观，梵语毗钵舍那，是对外境起观照。止观有小乘止观与大乘止观之分。小乘止观是从六根门头摄一而入，系缘而修。如修数息观是专注呼吸，知息出入，知息长短，知息冷暖，知息粗细。把心专注在呼吸上，心息相依，由粗而细，由细而无，从而息灭妄想。大乘止观则是在发菩提心的基础上，依大乘见地完成空性禅修。

观心能息灭妄想。心如流水般念念相续，平常人缺乏观照，总是随着念头东奔西跑。观心就是要认识到心念的虚妄。心究竟是什么？无非是由一系列经验和概念组成，所以《金刚经》告诉我们：“过去心不可得，现在心不可得，未来心不可得。”这是从时间上透视心念的本质。过去心不可得，是说过去已然过去，不必陷入追忆；未来心不可得，是说未来尚未到来，不必随着它跑。在前念过去而后念未生之际，保持中间这段清明的心，所谓“生灭灭已，寂灭现前”。

《楞严经》说：“狂心顿歇，歇即菩提。”临济禅师说：“沿流不止问如何，真照无边说似他，离相离名人不禀，吹毛用了急须磨。”这都是教导我们从观心中认识真心。

参话头能息灭妄想。这是禅宗修行的重要方法之一，话头通常有“念佛是谁？”“父母未生前本来面目是什么？”“无梦无想时主人是谁？”“一念未生前是什么？”等。参话头不可对话头下注解，不可以推理，不可以等开悟，不可以扔掉话头求静，不要给自己讲道理，外界动静一概不管，一路追问下去。黄龙禅师对参话头有个比喻：“如灵猫捕鼠，目睛不瞬，诸根顺向，首尾一直。”参话头重在一个“疑”字，祖师云：“大疑大悟，小疑小悟，不疑不悟。”要把自己全部身心凝聚在话头上，如活死人一般，不达到这个程度，不算上路。当话头参到得力时，专注一念，心无旁骛，妄想自然无从生起。

妄想是痛苦的根源，要在根本上断除痛苦，就要从息灭妄想着手。当妄想得到有效控制，我们就不会被它所转，从而拥有平静的心；我们就不会被妄想分

散精力，从而专心做事，提高学习和工作的效率；我们就不会被妄想干扰，从而制心一处，提高定力；我们就不会被妄想遮蔽佛性，从而使真心得以显现，智慧得以开发。所以说，息灭妄想的重要性不容忽视。

4. 认识自己

科技的进步，使人类能在宏观上认识其他星球，遨游太空之中；能在微观上直探物质构造，发现基因秘密。遗憾的是，这一切却不能帮助人类进一步认识自己。

如果我们不能对自己有清醒的认识，就不能把握心念，不能在烦恼生起的当下观照它，断除它。如果我们想从痛苦中解脱，首先得认识自己。如何才能认识自己？祖师告诉我们，直下承担就是认识自己。在我们的生命现象中，身体不是自己的，只是四大的假合；思维不是自己的，只是概念的延续。除了这些物质和精神，“我”是什么？

当年，佛陀在菩提树下成道时发现：奇哉！奇

哉！一切众生皆有如来智慧德相，只因妄想执著不能证得。在我们的内心，除了妄想执著，还有清静的如来智慧德相。所谓直下承当，就是要认识到自己本来具足的佛性。

大珠慧海禅师参拜马祖。祖问：“来这里干什么？”慧海禅师曰：“来求佛法。”祖曰：“我这里一物也无，求什么佛法？自家宝藏抛弃不顾，到处乱跑做什么？”慧海禅师问：“哪个是我的宝藏呢？”祖曰：“现在问我的就是你的宝藏，一切具足，更无欠少，使用自在，为什么还要到外面去求呢？”慧海禅师在马祖的开示下，当下认识到自己。后来有人问慧海禅师：“如何是佛？”他回答说：“清潭对面，非佛而谁？”又如灵训禅师参归宗，灵训问：“如何是佛？”归宗禅师说：“我告诉你，恐怕不相信。”灵训说：“大和尚的开示，我岂敢不信？”归宗禅师说：“你就是。”如何是佛？其实就是每个人真正的生命，就是我们的佛性。

佛性虽然不是我们见闻觉知的妄识，但也没离开见闻觉知。云门禅师说：“即此见闻非见闻，无余声

色可呈君。个中若了全无事，体用何妨分不分。”认识自己，要从能见能闻的作用中直下承当，但不可住于见闻之相。

不落于思维是认识自己。思维往往是名言概念的延续，是前尘影事的重现。一旦落于思维分别，住于是非得失的纠缠中，我们会迷失本性。临济禅师上堂开示道：“赤肉团上有一无位真人，常从汝等面门出入，未证者看看。”时有僧相问：“如何是无位真人？”师下禅床一把抓住他说：“道，道！”这位僧人想了一下，师便放开手说：“无位真人是甚么干屎橛。”又如六祖接引惠明的公案。六祖从五祖处得了衣钵后一路南行，惠明从后面追上。六祖将衣钵放在石上，惠明拿不动，于是说：“我为法来，不为衣来。”六祖说：“汝既为法来，可放下万缘，不要有任何念头。”又说：“不思善，不思恶，正与么时，哪个是明上座本来面目？”惠明当下认识到自己。这两则公案都告诉我们，只有离开通常的思维分别，才能认识自己。

明心见性是认识自己，要从心性中去认识。心指我们现前的心念，是虚妄不实、生灭变化的。但透过

生灭变化的表相，还有不生不灭的心体。明心见性，就是要我们明了心的虚妄，不被它的变化所迷惑，从中见到自己的清净心性和真正生命。

六祖在五祖门下悟道时说：“一切万法，不离自性。何期自性，本自清静；何期自性，本不生灭；何期自性，本自具足；何期自性，本无动摇；何期自性，能生万法。”五祖知六祖已经悟到本性，继续为他开示说：不识本心，学佛法是没有什么利益的。如果认识到本心，就会成为大丈夫、天人师、佛。

无始以来，众生因为不认识自己，于是认贼为子，随着妄想分别沉沦六道。如果我们认识自己的本地风光，就能熄灭烦恼妄想，不被外境的迁流变化牵引。从而开发本具的智慧潜能，在根本上把握命运，完善人格，如是方能得大自在。





LIFE'S SUFFERING AND ITS LIBERATION

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In our lives, the most important thing is life itself, and our greatest desire is happiness. How can we achieve happiness in life?

Throughout the ages, humanity has worked tirelessly to explore happiness. Regrettably, most people lack a correct understanding of this pursuit, blindly chasing wealth, status, fame, and love, believing that having these will lead to happiness. However, in today's materially advanced civilization, despite enjoying abundant material wealth, people are still plagued by worries and suffer immensely. What is the reason? Today, I wish to discuss from a Buddhist perspective: the suffering of life and its liberation.

I

THE CAUSES OF SUFFERING IN LIFE

What causes the suffering of life? This is a topic of great concern to many. If we were to investigate this issue, the answers would vary from person to person: some suffer from physical illness, bedridden for years; others suffer from lack of food and clothing, tirelessly working day in and day out; some suffer from loneliness as they age alone; others suffer from heartbreak, unable to alleviate their solitude; some are pained by their unfulfilled ambition to advance in their careers; while others suffer from slow business, unable to achieve wealth. Suffering manifests in myriad forms due to the differences in each person's circumstances, pursuits, and perceptions of pain.

However, all the above difficulties are just manifestations rather than the root cause of suffering. If a person suffers from a lack of food and clothing, will they find permanent happiness once well-fed and dressed? If a person is suffering from poor health, can they gain real happiness once they recover? If a person is suffering from being single, can they achieve perfect happiness once they get married and start a family? If a person suffers from low status, can they achieve long-lasting happiness once they flourish in a government position?

If our suffering could be eliminated through resolving these practical issues, then not so many people would be mired in misery. For anyone, as long as they have afflictions in life, they will suffer one way or another, regardless of material conditions, social status, or life experiences.

To live happily, we must find the root cause of suffering and eradicate it fundamentally. It is pretty similar to a doctor treating an illness. First, he must identify its root cause. Otherwise, the treatment will only be comforting

rather than a cure. The so-called remedy will only address symptoms rather than treat the illness itself. It only offers temporary relief, and the illness will invariably recur someday unless the root cause is removed.

So, what are the root causes of suffering in life? The Dharma teaches us the following aspects.

1. Ignorance

For most people, ignorance is generally understood as a lack of knowledge. In the current information era, knowledge seems particularly important. As is often said, *knowledge is power, and knowledge is wealth.*

Everyone here is an intellectual, and you are likely familiar with worldly knowledge. If you study history, you possess historical knowledge; if you study Chinese, you have literary knowledge; if you study philosophy, you have philosophical knowledge; if you study biology, you have biological knowledge. Having this knowledge can equip

you with survival skills and relevant competencies, but it offers little practical help in understanding your true self. In other words, having knowledge does not equate to having happiness or being free from suffering.

So, what is the ignorance that brings suffering to life?

From the viewpoint of the Dharma, ignorance is a lack of wisdom to see the truth about the universe and life. Regarding life itself, which is ever so close to us, we know almost nothing. We do not know where we came from before birth and where we will go after death. We are unaware of the causes and effects of life. Similarly, we are unfamiliar with our inner world: we lack the ability to control our thoughts. We become overwhelmed by our various moods, such as affliction, joy, pain, and ecstasy now and then. Facing our emotional turmoil, we, as victims, often feel at a loss. Meanwhile, we still lack the understanding of the world we live in. How exactly was the universe formed? When will the Earth be destroyed? Among all the things we know, what is illusion, and what

is reality? From the individual life to the universe upon which life depends, what we know is extremely limited. What we see and understand in the universe is merely a drop in the ocean.

Wrong views also arise from ignorance. Lacking wisdom, we cannot form the right views about the world and our lives, confusing right and wrong and producing many wrong views. As views guide our behaviors, our different views will shape different lives we lead.

For atheists who do not believe in the Law of Cause and Effect, they often take risks with illegal behaviors, hoping to escape the effect. However, once their karmic retribution comes to maturity, suffering is inevitable. As for hedonists, who believe in living for pleasure, they indulge in an extravagant or even wasteful lifestyle. They don't understand that their blessings are limited, just like a bank account that diminishes with each withdrawal. Similarly, the blessings we enjoy in this life come from the accumulation of past lives; enjoying a bit means losing a bit. If

one only squanders these blessings, once the blessings are depleted, they will be stricken by poverty in the future. Therefore, the ancient masters instructed us that blessings should not be enjoyed to the fullest. If blessings are used up, the source of happiness and joy will dry up.

Superstitions are caused by ignorance as well. In the face of the immense universe and complex nature, humanity appears insignificant and incapable. As Albert Einstein said, "The greatest secret lies in the existence of the universe and its comprehension." In early human activities, people did not understand the universe or life, so animism prevailed almost worldwide: mountains had their deities, trees had their deities, thunder had its deity, wind had its deity, rain had its deity, Wenchang (deity of literature and education) governed learning, Shennong (king of farmers) presided over agriculture, and Yama (king of death) ruled the underworld. Everything in the world was under the control of deities, and even the fortunes and misfortunes of our lives were somehow predestined.

Although modern science has to some extent explained these phenomena, keeping humans away from simple speculation and conjecture about the world, the influence of animism remains undiminished to this day. Today, many people still depend on the prayers and worship of deities to secure their happiness.

The fascination with fate has kept the ancient practice of fortune-telling very much alive to this day. So, does fate really exist? From the perspective of causality, fate indeed exists. However, the accuracy of fortune-telling and physiognomy is highly questionable, as it depends on the mental cultivation of the practitioner and the reliability of the texts they rely on. Often, these predictions about one's fate are nothing more than games that bewitch the mind. Over-reliance on them is clearly unwise. Some people also have a deep belief in Feng Shui, consulting experts for advice on purchasing land or building houses. Indeed, while environmental influences exist, it is one's own actions that have a direct impact on life. In fact, our fate is determined by the wholesome and unwholesome karma

we create, changing with our thoughts and deeds.

By contrast, some people would claim they are not believers or fans of anything mentioned above. However, after careful observation, we can often find that everyone has something they particularly care about and focus on, causing their thoughts to involuntarily turn towards it. It is exactly what captivates our minds: those greedy for wealth are obsessed with money, those greedy for lust are obsessed with desire, those greedy for power are obsessed with authority, and others are fans of football, singers, or movies.

In general, unawakened people will inevitably be fond of particular objects or crave external things. Because of this delusion, there comes attachment, and their attachment becomes one of the roots of their suffering. When our mind is immersed in something, we are manipulated by its various changes, unable to remain detached. Those obsessed with wealth rack their brains for more money; those obsessed with power spare no effort for higher

status; music fans often yearn day and night for their idols; and over the years, the repeated defeats of the Chinese football team have brought much disappointment and frustration to its many fans!

Our bad habits also stem from ignorance. Habits are an essential factor that influences our mindset and life quality. We can even say that they affect our way of living, direct our lives, and seal our fate.

In our lives, cultivating good habits is crucial. However, because of ignorance, all beings will often be unknowingly contaminated by bad habits. Some people enjoy extravagance, spending lavishly to show off their wealth. This only diminishes their blessings and even attracts greedy eyes. Some like to showcase themselves and brag about their abilities, only leading to the opposite effect and provoking others' aversion. Some like to act preemptorily, using forceful means to eliminate dissent and suppress others, ending up making many enemies. Some like to fish for fame through various improper means, only to be

despised by others. Others like gambling and consider it a highly profitable business until they get deeply entrapped in it, to the point of losing their family fortune.

Bad habits also form the emergence of social issues and crimes. As you know, conflicts usually stem from self-centeredness; theft often begins with seeking small profit; corruption arises with abuse of power for personal gain; violence often starts with bullying the weak; fraud is from idleness and laziness. When bad habits are in their nascent stage, they seldom capture our attention. However, if they are allowed to develop, without being noticed in time, they can bring about dreadful consequences. For instance, although the dangers of drugs and their prohibition are known to all, drug abuse remains hard to tackle. The reason is that, from the beginning, many drug addicts do not realize that their behaviors have violated the law. They are merely indulged in bad habits. Some try to challenge the law out of curiosity; some want to seek thrills when feeling empty and bored; and some attempt to escape from reality when frustrated with their lives.

Unfortunately, they do not realize that such temporary satisfaction will bring endless trouble, ruining their body and mind.

Additionally, not allowing our mind a moment of relaxation is also a bad habit. We are so used to being busy that our minds cannot rest peacefully for a while. After finishing our work and household chores, we usually fill our little spare time with various entertainment. Although TV programs have greatly broadened our horizons, expanded our knowledge, and enriched our cultural lives to a large extent, it has also become so indispensable that we spend much time watching them. It is the same with the global prevalence of the internet. Under the enticing guise of modern technology, they constantly incite us to seek external things, making us feel fulfilled only with external stimuli. The moment we have some spare time, we feel empty and bored. But this kind of “fulfillment” is temporary and illusory.

What is truly fulfilling comes from within. When we look

within and find that inherently pure source which encompasses all dharmas, we can achieve self-sufficiency and find balance in any situation without having to depend on external circumstances.

2. Attachment

Because of ignorance, we further develop attachment.

The attachments of sentient beings are pervasive everywhere and at all times. In Buddhist sutras and treatises, this is referred to as “attachment arising out of pervasive discrimination.” “Pervasive” means universal, and “discrimination” refers to differentiating among all things. Such discrimination is incorrect because it originates from our ignorance of the world and our wrong views. Here, “attachment” refers to our clinging, which arises from our illusory discrimination. Buddhism categorizes attachment into two types.

1) Attachment to Dharmas

The attachment to dharmas means clinging to the dharmas. When we talk about “dharmas,” we usually understand it as laws or rules, while in Buddhism, “dharmas” has a broader meaning, for it includes everything in the world: whether spiritual or material, conditioned or unconditioned, virtuous or vile; pure or defiled. They all belong to the category of “dharmas.”

In Buddhism, “dharmas” is defined as “everything has its standards or rules, so it can be understood; everything has its properties, so it differs from others.” Let’s put it this way: “Everything has its standards or rules,” so people can understand what it is; “everything has its properties” means the dharmas possess their distinct features. For example, water has the property of wetness, for wetness is its feature; fire has the property of heat, for heat is its feature. In short, everything can be analyzed from the perspective of the dharmas.

Having understood the “dharmas,” let’s talk about

“attachment to the dharmas.” It is very common for sentient beings to attach to the dharmas, such as the attachment to names, words, and concepts. In reality, words are nothing more than symbols agreed upon by successive generations. They are not the facts themselves, akin to how uttering “fire” does not scorch the mouth. However, sentient beings in their ignorance always regard names, words and concepts as actual entities, with their attachment to names being particularly strong.

In addition to our attachment to names and words, we have also become obsessed with our bodies. As the saying goes, good health is the beginning of everything. However, in our whole life, rather than saying we use our bodies to serve our study and work, it is more accurate to say that we have often become the most faithful servants to our bodies: busy with its eating, its clothing, its living, its pleasures, and its various other desires. Even after being busy for decades, we still feel the need to do more, hoping to remain busy forever. From the refinement of magical pills in ancient times to the preservation of sick bodies in

our modern era, humanity has been occupied with various unimaginable ways to live up to the illusion of immortality. But such efforts, as they have turned out, have certainly been fruitless because everything in the world is impermanent. Even the Earth has its day of destruction; how can our frail bodies expect to endure? The sutras tell us: “Where there is birth, there is no escape from death.” If we cling to our physical body as an eternal and unchanging entity, we will find it hard to face its aging and the inevitable arrival of death.

Likewise, we are deeply attached to our physical appearances. This is especially true for girls, who value their looks greatly. They spend a lot of time and effort decorating their bodies, applying makeup, changing hairstyles, leaving their bodies in a state of unrest. But the fact is that the body is not as clean as we often expect. Not to mention bodies as decaying corpses. Even young girls in the prime of their youth, what do they contain inside their bodies? Beneath the skin and flesh is nothing more than a skeletal frame, and within the frame are nothing but internal

organs that honestly can't be beautified. As for the contents of the organs, they are even filthier. Every day, we walk around carrying these things within us. We don't feel disgusted but instead cherish them in every possible way and always try to dress up nicely for them. Though this body is *impure with its nine orifices constantly discharging impurities*, we, sentient beings, do not recognize this fact. Conversely, we cling to the body as pure and permanent, breeding many unnecessary afflictions. Therefore, the Buddha repeatedly admonished us to contemplate the body as impure and impermanent.

Beyond the body, we are also attached to wealth as a substantial and permanent entity. As the process of commercialization in society progresses, the mantra of money being omnipotent has reached an unbridled extent, as if having money means having everything, thus everything we do revolves around money. Of course, appropriate material wealth is required to satisfy our survival needs. However, today, although we have basically solved the problem of food and clothing, our attachment to wealth

has not diminished but instead strengthened. Money is worshiped as a deity, and earning money is considered the sole goal of life. For many people, possessing wealth is no longer about ensuring a livelihood but a means to satisfy their greed. But have we considered that accumulated wealth will eventually dissipate? Thieves will devise myriad ways to take it, descendants will squander it without guilt, and even if it's securely locked in a safe, inflation can turn it into beautiful but useless paper overnight, not to mention destruction by natural or human-made disasters. Therefore, if we regard wealth as eternal, we are undoubtedly planting another seed of suffering in our lives.

The attachment to affection is one of the causes of suffering. If we are eager for a harmonious and loving relationship, we may, one way or the other, be disappointed once reality sets in. Some may toss and turn for unrequited love, unable to get what they desire; some may be saddened by a separation from their beloved, or by living far away from each other; some may agonize over being with someone they dislike due to frequent conflicts. If two persons

become mutually enamored, they may expect their love to last forever. But this world is impermanent, and so is the mind. No matter what they have pledged to each other, it will hardly withstand the test of impermanence. We always view marriage and family as important to a happy life, yet we don't know that they are a source of troubles and concerns.

In addition to all the attachments above, we usually cling to many other things, such as status, career, reputation, and loved ones. Still, we hardly realize that everything in the world is impermanent and illusory. If we are obsessed with illusions, insisting they are real and permanent, we will fall into the pit we dig for ourselves. Only when we fully recognize the false appearance that originates dependently and understand its empty nature, can we root out our attachments.

2) Attachment to the Self

In Buddhism, self refers to something that is dominating,

eternal, and unchanging.

Sentient beings always feel that in their lives, there is a constant, unchanging self that dominates. As a result, they always think of themselves, place the self at the core of everything, and their every word and every action reflect a strong sense of ego: “I” like, “I” dislike, “I” love, “I” hate. If we were to count, how many times do we unknowingly say “I” in a single day?

Because there is an “I,” attachment to the self thus arises.

Usually, we tend to be attached to our name, thinking of it as “I.” Every time our name is mentioned, it will attract our attention. We feel our name is “I,” and believe that praising our name equals praising “I” or defaming our name equals defaming “I.” In reality, our name is no more than a mark given by our parents, which cannot represent the true self. Otherwise, if we changed our name, we would become someone else. Besides, those with nicknames, pen names, and other names alike can hardly

distinguish which names can represent themselves. From that perspective, it makes no sense to take our name as “I” and feel worried or delighted about it.

Also, we always take our body as “I.” In fact, according to Buddhism, a body is just a provisional aggregate of the four primary elements, namely, earth, water, fire, and wind, and none of them bears the mark of “I.” For this reason, the ancient Chan masters raised the question: “What was your original face before your birth?” As for our bodies, which part of it can really stand as “I”? With today’s advanced medical technology, many parts of our body can even be transplanted or recreated. If there had been an organ called “I,” the concept of self would have been challenged earlier by modern medicine: Who am “I” after cosmetic surgery? Who am “I” after a heart transplant? However, due to ignorance, we falsely cling to this illusory physical body as “I” and worry over its beauty or ugliness, its stature being tall or short, and its health or weakness, thus endlessly seeking trouble. Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism in ancient China, once said, “The

reason I have great trouble is that I have a body. When I no longer have a body, what trouble do I have?” This echoes with the Buddhist principle that “the body is the root of suffering.”

We also take our clothing as “I,” paying particular attention to our appearance and thinking that wearing famous brands makes us superior. We also take our profession as “I,” convinced that our occupation is not only a means of making a living but also a symbol of our status in society. We also take our status as “I,” feeling incredibly proud and arrogant once we hold important positions. But what do our clothing, profession and status have to do with the true “I”? Once all these changes, will “I” also feel high or low accordingly?

We have a diverse range of attachments, all-pervasive and lasting, which can essentially be summarized as two kinds of attachments – the attachment to the dharmas and the attachment to the self. Where there is no self at all, we still cling to the self; where there is no permanence, we

still cling to permanence; we cling to the impure as the pure; we also cling to suffering as pleasure. These attachments bring us perpetual concerns and endless troubles and make us suffer when things don't go according to our wishes. Only by using wisdom can we eliminate ignorance and attachment, enjoy the freedom of letting go, and liberate ourselves from bondage.

3. Afflictions

Ignorance and attachment are the roots of life's suffering because they give rise to afflictions. Afflictions are not only the cause of suffering; they are suffering itself. Our inner peace will vanish once we are infected with the viruses called afflictions. Lurking in our lives, they dwell in our minds. Wherever we go, we bring our afflictions with us, just like a shadow following its form.

So, what exactly are the afflictions we have? The Buddhist sutras mention that there are 84,000 afflictions. In the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless

Realm, sentient beings of different levels are fraught with different afflictions. Among these, there are six primary afflictions, which serve as the soil from which all other afflictions arise; there are also twenty secondary afflictions, which arise in response to the influence of the six primary afflictions. Let us first get to know the primary afflictions.

The first primary affliction is greed. It is one of humanity's most common mental activities. Greed refers to a defiled attachment to take possession of the object of our liking.

When the raging flames of greed engulf our minds, we might lose control of our behavior and do everything we can to satisfy our greed. Because of greed, we may use all means possible to acquire wealth, conspire for personal status, undeservedly glorify ourselves and defame others for the sake of reputation, or not hesitate to trample on our dignity through distorted and flattering means, to achieve ulterior motives.

There is a wide range of greed. The *Discourse on the Theory*

of Consciousness-Only teaches that the nature of greed is a defiled attachment to the Three Realms and the causes of all their phenomena. The Three Realms include the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm. Sentient beings are attached to every phenomenon in the Three Realms and their causes. Specifically, we are greedy for our body, wealth, career, reputation, delicious food, gorgeous colors, musical sounds, pretty compliments, comfortable houses, cozy environments. In short, we crave everything.

Our minds cannot stop being obsessed with greed, causing various obstacles. When our greed is not satisfied, our mind is occupied and tormented by strong desires, even leading to morbid desires, making us disregard moral norms and legal constraints, and act recklessly under the drive of greed. Even when greed is temporarily satisfied, our minds still cannot find peace, falling into fear of losing everything, trapped in anxiety over gain and loss. What's worse, those desires that are fully stirred up continue to destroy our reason and make us sink deeper and deeper

into the trap of greed.

From an individual perspective, greed is the root of afflictions in one's life, while for humankind, greed is the source of all human-made disasters. What influence does greed have over the world?

As desires escalate, humanity is consuming our planet's limited natural resources in an unprecedented way: massive forests are being cut down, minerals are blindly exploited, the air is polluted, and water sources are deteriorating. The vicious cycle formed by the rapid depletion of resources and the constant growth of greed is spreading across the world. Consequently, within just a few generations, we have caused more destruction to nature than all of the past several thousand years combined. Today, we are almost choking nature in our demand for more. If we can't overcome our greed and keep our possessive desires within reasonable limits, and instead continue to develop and indulge them, we'll leave future generations with nothing but a scarred Earth, a home unsuitable for

human habitation.

Contrary to the possessiveness characterized by greed, hatred means we harbor annoyance and rejection against the things we dislike.

Hatred reveals itself in many ways. In daily life, quarrels and fights triggered by hatred can be witnessed everywhere. Some become angered by disagreements with each other; some confront each other furiously over conflicts of interest. When others bring trouble or harm to us, we may develop hatred towards them. To top it off, we sometimes take our anger out on others by blaming our faults on them.

Hatred can lead to the loss of inner peace. However, after analysis, we will find that hatred is essentially the manifestation of ignorance. When we lose our temper, we are virtually “punishing ourselves for others’ faults,” making us the primary victim. Even worse, hatred can turn minor conflicts into bigger ones. When hatred is put into action,

reason disappears, morality disappears, and even the law disappears. As it is said in the Buddhist sutra, “When a single thought of hatred arises, a million obstacles unfold.”

Jealousy also comes from hatred. While we are capable of having minds as vast as the sky, there are times when we become so narrow-minded that we fail to consider anyone but ourselves. When envy clouds our minds, we might find it hard to tolerate the glory, success, or happiness of others. Jealousy is a terrible state of mind. Out of jealousy, we slander others, interfere with their lives, and create obstacles for them at every turn. Under extreme jealousy, we may even take delight in wishing death upon them, thus embarking on the path of crime.

To overcome jealousy, the Buddhist sutras encourage us to rejoice over others’ merits. When other people are performing charitable services, diligently practicing the Buddha Dharma, or making progress on the path, we may obtain the same merits as they do, as long as we rejoice sincerely and praise them genuinely. So rejoicing over others’

merits is an extraordinary practice that helps us overcome jealousy effectively and offers us a shortcut to obtain both mundane and supramundane merits.

Pride, commonly referred to as arrogance, is also a critical component of primary afflictions. Pride leads us to overestimate ourselves and look down on others, unwilling to be humble before the talented and virtuous. Moreover, pride can lead us to stubbornly insist on doing as we please, resulting in a variety of negative actions. There are several different manifestations of pride.

Pride: When others have lesser abilities and knowledge or are equal to oneself, those burdened with pride often become arrogant and look down on others.

Excessive Pride: When others match or surpass one's abilities in every aspect, excessive pride can lead to complacency and a failure to acknowledge others' strengths.

Superiority Pride: When others surpass oneself significantly

in every aspect, such pride leads one to distort the truth, still believing oneself to be superior and unable to tolerate the achievements and admiration others rightfully deserve.

Self-Pride: The life form, composed of the Five Aggregates, is inherently without a self. Yet, due to delusion, we always believe there exists an “I” within it. Furthermore, we exaggerate and elevate the self, centering everything around ourselves, feeling that everyone should respect us, follow our commands and assignments, act according to our will, and even wishing that the entire world revolves around us and our needs.

Overestimation Pride: Some people become smug and conceited after noticing a minor benefit or response in their spiritual practice, mistakenly thinking they’ve achieved a significant spiritual milestone. Those who become deluded due to misguided practices generally fall into this category.

Inferiority Pride: Some individuals are predisposed to self-degradation and willingly embrace moral downfall, yet they simultaneously disregard others' strengths. Despite opportunities to learn from others, they choose not to, aiming to conceal their ignorance. This results in a complete absence of humility, a lack of respect for others, and a failure to understand that true growth stems from modesty.

Misguided Pride: Certain individuals, devoid of authentic knowledge and virtue, seek worldly recognition and pursue hidden agendas. They resort to deceptive methods to promote themselves, angling for fame and an unearned reputation.

There is a saying that goes, "Humility brings benefits, while arrogance invites failure." An excessively proud person is unlikely to advance in learning or moral development. Their inability to recognize their own flaws or acknowledge others' strengths leads them to look down on others. Moreover, they disregard advice and resist learning

from others with an open mind, undeniably impeding their own growth.

As the saying goes, “literati often belittle each other,” a phenomenon driven by pride. Often, those skilled in a particular area become excessively proud, feeling entitled due to their abilities. Furthermore, the constant praise and deference they receive only fuel their arrogance, leading them to believe they are superior and have an advantage over others.

Pride also makes it difficult for people to get along harmoniously. Generally, those burdened with pride have an exceptionally strong sense of self-esteem, always desiring respect from others and intolerant of any disdain. Due to an excessive focus on oneself, they often fail to treat others with equality and do not show the due respect to others, even going as far as to hurt others as they please. However, relationships among people are reciprocal. If we wish to be respected by others, we must first respect them and treat them with a friendly attitude. If we fail to

do this, always belittling others, whether intentionally or unintentionally, they will naturally respond to us in the same manner. Moreover, people with too strong a sense of self-esteem often have fragile emotions. In their eyes, they hold a supreme position, only accustomed to obedience and compliments. Once faced with setbacks, their spirit can easily collapse.

4. Creating Karma

Afflictions are not only the cause that disturbs our inner peace, but they also confuse us and make us create negative karma.

Buddhism classifies human actions into three types: wholesome actions, unwholesome actions, and neutral actions. Among these, only wholesome and unwholesome actions can generate karma, which in turn leads to future happiness or suffering. So, what are the criteria for distinguishing between wholesome and unwholesome actions? The explanation given in the *Discourse on the*

Theory of Consciousness-Only is that actions beneficial to oneself and others in this and future lives are considered wholesome, while those harmful to oneself and others in this and future lives are considered unwholesome. Therefore, the determination of wholesome and unwholesome actions is not based on immediate benefits but is defined by the results they bring about, spanning both the present and future lives.

An action is truly wholesome only when it yields benefits both now and in the future. Take, for example, the act of giving, which Buddhism promotes as a wholesome deed. It is beneficial not only to oneself and others in this life but also in future lives. First, giving helps one overcome selfishness and greed, fostering a generous and compassionate mindset that enhances current joy. Furthermore, it sets the stage for amassing immeasurable wealth in the future, thus ensuring happiness in subsequent lives. Lastly, the act of giving accumulates the merits necessary for attaining Buddhahood, and it brings about a unique joy stemming from the Dharma.

In contrast, actions harmful to both the present and the future are viewed as unwholesome deeds. Behaviors such as killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, and lying not only harm others and breach laws but also pave a path to inevitable suffering. Individuals committing these acts will confront their conscience's censure, risk retaliation, and face legal repercussions in this life. Furthermore, they are destined to endure the agonies of the Three Wretched Realms (the realms of hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals) in future lives. When retribution arrives, ready or not, they will have no option but to endure the consequences of the actions they themselves have set into motion.

Beyond wholesome and unwholesome actions, there are also neutral actions. "Neutral" here means that these actions cannot be classified distinctly as either wholesome or unwholesome. Examples include drinking water when thirsty, eating some bread when hungry, taking a break when tired, and engaging in legitimate, moderate entertainment. Additionally, karmic consequences are

deemed as neutral. For instance, the joys experienced in Human and Heavenly Realms, though enjoyable in this life, do not bring benefits for the future and thus cannot be categorized as wholesome. Similarly, suffering karmic consequences in the Wretched Realms, while detrimental in this life, do not affect the future and hence cannot be considered unwholesome.

The *Sutra on the Ten Wholesome Actions* also discusses the criteria for distinguishing between wholesome and unwholesome. The sutra states: “What is called a wholesome Dharma refers to the actions that serve as the foundation for achieving the fruits of the Human and Heavenly Realms, the path of the Sravakas, the path of the Pratyekabuddhas, and the unsurpassed Bodhi. All these are accomplished based on the ten wholesome actions, which is called wholesome Dharma.” This means that actions are deemed wholesome or unwholesome based on their outcomes. Actions that lead to the attainment of worldly and supermundane fruits across the Five Vehicles are considered wholesome dharma. For instance, the practice of

the Five Precepts and Ten Good Deeds in the Human and Heavenly Vehicle, the Thirty-Seven Factors of Enlightenment in the Sravaka vehicle, and the Six Perfections and Four Means of Conversion in the Bodhisattva vehicle are all regarded as wholesome actions. Conversely, actions that lead to the suffering of the Wretched Realms are considered unwholesome.

Wholesome and unwholesome actions take on many forms, but the fundamental ones are the ten wholesome and the ten unwholesome actions. Let us examine the ten unwholesome actions first.

The first, killing, which means to intentionally end the life of a sentient being with malice. If all the following five conditions are met, the karma of killing is formed: 1. The intention to kill; 2. The act targets another sentient being; 3. Confirming the target of the act is a sentient being; 4. Carried out the actions to kill, with all preparations made; 5. Killed the specific intended being without error.

The second, taking what is not given, or stealing, includes actions such as deceitful acquisition, theft, robbery, usurpation, and embezzlement. If all the following five conditions are met, the karma of stealing is formed: 1. Intentionally having the mind to steal; 2. Targeting others' property; 3. Knowing this property belongs to others; 4. Making preparations for stealing; 5. Stealing the targeted property not by mistake.

The third, sexual misconduct. If all the following four conditions are met, the karma of sexual misconduct is formed: 1. Improper partners, engaging in sexual relations with someone else's wife, one's own parents or siblings; 2. Improper means, engaging in non-vaginal sexual relations; 3. Improper times, engaging in sexual relations with one's own spouse at inappropriate times, such as during pregnancy, nursing, or religious fasting, is also considered sexual misconduct; 4. Improper places, engaging in sexual relations in temples or near Buddhist pagodas.

The fourth, deceitful speech, or false speech, includes

lying, instructing others to tell lies, sending others to tell lies, making up lies in the written language, or deceiving others by giving tacit approval, giving a hint, nodding the head, making a gesture, and so on. The following four conditions constitute the act of false speech: 1. Deceiving others with statements that contradict facts, such as claiming to have seen what has not been seen, or not seen what has been seen; 2. The other party understands your meaning; 3. Having a deceitful mind; 4. The other party accepts your statement as true.

The fifth, divisive speech that serves to alienate one person from another. The act of divisive speech is established through four conditions: 1. Distorting the facts with the intention of sowing seeds of discord among other people; 2. Deliberately using language intended to trigger a conflict or provoke disputes; 3. The other party understands what you've said; 4. The other party accepts it as true.

The sixth, harsh speech, or verbal abuse, includes various sarcastic and insulting language such as slander, attacks,

sarcasm, and ridicule. The act of harsh speech is established through four conditions: 1. Intending to harm others; 2. Using unkind words, such as various forms of uncivil language; 3. The other party understands what you've said; 4. The other party accepts it as true.

The seventh, frivolous speech, idle gossip, or words of gossip. This is established through two conditions: 1. With a defiled mind, flattering and pandering to others for personal purposes; 2. The language spoken involves inciting lust or theft, such as love songs with explicit lyrics, idle gossip about anything and everything, and incorrect or heretical views.

The eighth, greed, which means coveting others' wealth, status, family, and so on, with the desire to possess them as one's own.

The ninth, hatred, an intention to harm other sentient beings out of annoyance.

The tenth, erroneous views. This includes denying the Law of Cause and Effect, disbelieving in the existence of past and future lives. Nihilistic perspectives, such as those of materialists, and eternalistic views, often embraced by adherents of various religions, are considered examples of deluded erroneous views.

The opposite of the ten unwholesome actions are the ten wholesome actions: no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no false speech, no frivolous speech, no divisive speech, no harsh speech, no greed, no hatred, and no erroneous views.

The ten wholesome actions and ten unwholesome actions are all created through the three actions of body, speech, and mind. Killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, along with the abstinence from killing, stealing or sexual misconduct, belong to the action of the body; false speech, frivolous speech, divisive speech and harsh speech, along with the abstinence from false speech, frivolous speech, divisive speech and harsh speech, belong to

the action of speech; greed, hatred, and erroneous views, along with the abstinence from greed, hatred, or erroneous views, belong to the action of the mind.

Fundamentally, both bodily and verbal actions originate from the mind's actions. It's the afflictions within the mind that prompt unwholesome bodily and verbal actions. A mind clouded by greed may resort to killing, driven by various motives. Some individuals might be lured by the taste of succulent meat or the prospect of profit from trading in butchered animals. Others may seek the thrill of trapping and hunting, while some, coveting another's wealth, do not shy away from the sin of devising schemes to acquire wealth, even at the expense of taking lives.

Greed is also the catalyst for wars between nations and conflicts between regions. For millennia, the world has witnessed a relentless cycle of conflicts, both major and minor, fueled by the desire to seize territories and pillage resources to fulfill insatiable ambitions. This dynamic has

now reached a critical point, with nations threatening each other with nuclear arms, posing a significant, latent threat to global peace.

Greed is the root of theft. Criminals, who cast aside the law to seize others' property, are propelled by greed. Similarly, greed leads to sexual misconduct, with desires causing individuals to abandon reason and engage in inappropriate relationships. Furthermore, greed incites false speech. The saying "there's no business without deceit" prompts the question of whether merchants are inherently dishonest. Fundamentally, it is greed that drives them to seek excessive profits, sacrificing truth and misleading others in the process. Although greed originates in the mind, once it manifests, it significantly influences both bodily actions and speech.

Similarly, hatred can give rise to a range of unwholesome actions. It can incite violence, disrupting peaceful coexistence and sparking conflicts. It is hard for an angry person to remain rational. As hatred deepens, conflicts can

intensify, leading from verbal altercations to physical violence, with minor skirmishes causing injuries and serious confrontations sometimes resulting in death.

Hatred can also lead to theft, as envy towards others' wealth may compel one to engage in robbery or thievery to unlawfully claim what is not theirs. Moreover, hatred can result in sexual misconduct. In today's society full of violence, crimes driven by hatred leave many innocent individuals, especially women, to suffer. Additionally, hatred fosters false speech. Against those we dislike or with whom we have had conflicts, we may hide the truth and intentionally deceive. This extends to the business realm, where competitors might not deal with each other honestly, or may even resort to scams to inflict financial losses on one another.

Karmic retribution is unfailing. Any karma we create, no matter its size or severity, will eventually bring about its consequences. However, the process from cause to effect also depends on supporting conditions, that is, the

influence of external circumstances. Only when both causes and conditions are present can the karmic results ripen. Therefore, karma is divided into four types.

The first is the karma of the present retribution, which can bring karmic consequences to this life.

The second is the karma of the retribution in the next rebirth, which can bring karmic consequences to the next life.

The third is the karma of the subsequent retribution, which can inflict karmic consequences in future lives.

The fourth is the karma of uncertain retribution, which means the karma that still has the potential for change, so the timing and severity of the consequences are not fully fixed.

Many people are unaware of the principle of cause and effect that spans across three lifetimes: past, present, and

future. As a result, they frequently lament about seeming injustices dealt by higher powers. However, the maturation of karmic consequences can be likened to the growth of a seed, which requires nourishment from soil, sunlight, rain, and dew, in addition to a specific process and timeframe.

5. Suffering Results

Our current existence and circumstances are shaped by the karma accumulated in our past. It is crucial to note that the karma we have created, whether wholesome or unwholesome, is inherently tainted and with outflow. As a result, the consequences that manifest from karma are laden with flaws and suffering.

Buddhist scriptures enumerate eight types of suffering that sentient beings endure: birth, aging, illness, death, separation from loved ones, unfulfilled desires, encounters with those one resents, and the distress caused by the overwhelming presence of the Five Aggregates. These

sufferings may originate from mental afflictions, particularly those caused by the intense imbalance of the Five Aggregates. Additionally, suffering can arise from physical experiences, including the processes of birth, aging, illness, and death. Interpersonal relationships contribute to suffering through the pain of separation and the frustration of unmet desires. Moreover, suffering can be triggered by external factors, such as natural disasters resulting from the imbalance of earth, water, fire, and wind.

The Buddha encourages us to understand suffering not to passively accept it, but to deeply comprehend its causes and effects. This understanding allows us to leave suffering behind and attain happiness.

Some individuals have short lifespans or face frequent illnesses. This is due to their past actions that caused harm or death to animals, or subjected them to severe mistreatment. These actions lead to a level of suffering for the perpetrator in their current life that mirrors their past deeds. Likewise, there are those who struggle with poverty and

continuous failure, finding obstacles in every endeavor, including business, where success remains elusive. This pattern can often be traced back to previous greed and stinginess. A person's wealth and status are reflections of their past generosity, just as the saying goes, "You reap what you sow." Hence, if we failed to cultivate blessings in our past lives, blaming others or fate is misguided.

Moreover, excessive anger can manifest as unattractiveness and widespread dislike in the present. Anger distorts one's features, making an angry face the most unappealing. Those who frequently indulge in anger may, therefore, find themselves dealing with the repercussion of perceived ugliness. Similarly, poor interpersonal relationships can stem from past actions, particularly from sowing discord and ruining friendships through divisive speech. This leads to an inability to live in harmony or be treated sincerely by others in the current life.

Relationship issues, such as having a disloyal spouse or facing a broken marriage, are the result of sexual misconduct

in past lives. Lastly, individuals who are looked down upon or hold a lower status are experiencing the consequences of excessive pride in their previous existence.

Many other examples could be mentioned. In essence, every phenomenon in the world operates according to its causes and effects, adhering to specific patterns of development. By understanding the principle of causality, we ought to adopt it as a guide for our lives and a benchmark for our actions. We should neither disregard doing good deeds because they seem minor, nor engage in wrongdoings because they appear inconsequential. This approach reflects a responsible attitude towards oneself and one's future lives.

II

THE WAY TO HAPPINESS

What is happiness? How does one attain it? The answers to these questions differ for each individual. Some find happiness in vast wealth, while others in a wealth of knowledge. Some are fulfilled by significant social standing, others by mutual love. For some, career success is the key to happiness, and for others, it's found in health and longevity.

However, is this what happiness is all about?

If that were the case, then individuals with immense fortunes should be happy. However, despite their substantial

wealth and grand ventures, many are unable to evade suffering and live in a state of constant frustration. Similarly, distinguished politicians should find happiness, but entangled in the complexities of power, they fluctuate between feelings of invincibility and being under siege, seldom finding genuine contentment. Likewise, couples in perfect harmony should experience happiness, yet no joy lasts forever. With the inevitable arrival of impermanence, loved ones will pass away, leading each to part ways.

In Buddhist teachings, the forms of happiness pursued by the worldly are considered “contaminated.” This term signifies that worldly happiness inherently includes elements of affliction. For instance, a professional dedicated to their career may find themselves completely absorbed, laboring without respite. Similarly, those in positions of power often find themselves constrained, lacking freedom in their actions and speech, perpetually concerned about potential schemes from others, the loss of their status, or even the necessity to act against their conscience. This raises the question: Do positions of authority and career

pursuits genuinely lead to happiness?

So, how can we attain true happiness? Buddhism teaches us that it involves the following aspects.

1. Establishing Right Views

Ignorance is the root cause of the cycle of rebirth for all sentient beings. Therefore, adopting right views forms the foundation for our liberation from suffering. To leave suffering behind and achieve happiness, we must first establish a correct understanding of the world and life.

Then, what are the right views?

1) Believing in the Law of Cause and Effect

Everyone is familiar with the term “Cause and Effect,” but it’s difficult to truly understand and firmly believe in it. Usually, we interpret it with the saying, “You reap what you sow.” However, the Dharma says, “Sentient beings’

karma is inconceivable, and the retribution is also inconceivable.” As the fundamental law governing the existence of all things, the Law of Cause and Effect is far from being as mechanical and simplistic as we might think.

To understand the Law of Cause and Effect, we should, first and foremost, be convinced that there are wholesome and unwholesome actions and be clear about what they are. Secondly, we should believe that there are different karmic consequences. Wholesome actions can lead to good karma, and unwholesome actions can lead to negative karma. Whether karmic consequences come sooner or later, we will eventually reap the good or negative karma we have created. Thirdly, we should believe in past and future lives, and life is a continuous process with a beginningless past and an infinite future, in which this present life is merely a chapter, and the Law of Cause and Effect is the link that runs through all episodes. Finally, we should believe that there are saints and ordinary people. That is, there are high and low levels of life. Life is malleable; it can be uplifted through moral purification or degraded

by the deepening of afflictions. This potential for change renders our efforts meaningful. After all, if our lives were unchangeable or concluded entirely at death, what significance would there be in our actions, whether good or bad, in this world?

The Law of Cause and Effect reveals the underlying rules governing life. However, those who don't believe in this law prioritize immediate interests over anything else rather than considering future consequences. Only by correctly understanding cause and effect can we have a long-term vision and change our fate through continuous efforts.

If we hope to possess wealth in future lives, we should practice generosity as much as possible. Indulgence is a consumption of blessings and giving is the cultivation of our field of merit. Just as sowing seeds is essential for harvesting, generosity is crucial for attaining wealth and prosperity. Thus, giving holds greater blessing than receiving.

If we hope for longevity, we should cherish the lives of

all sentient beings, be compassionate without taking life, and actively engage in protecting all beings from harm and setting captured animals free. If we hope to be noble and dignified in appearance, we should cultivate a mind of tolerance, greeting everyone with kindness, regardless of enemies or loved ones. If we hope for a harmonious relationship, we should free ourselves of jealousy, interact with others in a friendly manner, offer to help them out of difficulties, and rejoice over their glory. If we hope to be of noble birth, we should be respectful to our parents, teachers, and virtuous people. At the same time, we should never look down upon those of low status, but treat them equally without discrimination.

2) Believing in Impermanence

It is the attachment to permanence that inflicts great suffering in our lives. Therefore, in order to be relieved from afflictions and suffering, we must gain insight into the essence of impermanence. Buddhist sutras tell us, "All compounded things are impermanent and subject to birth

and decay.” In other words, all conditioned things cannot escape the law of birth and death.

Our thoughts are impermanent. Our current states of happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy, including any mindset, are influenced not only by internal causes but also by external conditions. This is particularly true for ordinary people, whose minds often change with their circumstances. When external situations shift, so does the mindset. It’s like the ocean, sometimes calm and tranquil, other times stormy and turbulent; or like the sky, sometimes clear and cloudless, and at other times overcast with clouds.

Our body is also impermanent. From the time we had this physical body, we constantly underwent the test of impermanence. Because of impermanence, the little genetic material inherited from our parents grew into our large present body; because of impermanence, vigorous young people are gradually aging day by day; because of impermanence, our strong body is threatened by illness, always at risk of disease and even death. That’s why the Buddha

admonishes his disciples, as is recorded in the *Sutra in Forty-Two Sections*, that “Human life hangs by a breath.”

Our country and society are also impermanent. The opening chapter of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* says, “The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide. Thus, it has ever been.” This reveals the truth that impermanence also rules countries and societies. Browsing through any books on China’s ancient history, you will find that Chinese history has evolved by the Law of Impermanence. At the end of the Zhou Dynasty, seven states began to contend with each other for hegemony. The state of Qin eventually swallowed them up. After the collapse of the Qin Dynasty, a civil war broke out between two armies called Chu and Han, leading to the Han seizing power over the country. At the end of the Han Dynasty, the Three Kingdoms emerged, followed by unification under the Jin Dynasty; after the fall of the Jin Dynasty, the Southern and Northern Dynasties were divided until reunification under the Sui and Tang dynasties. Inevitably, all dynasties, spanning several decades or centuries,

had to go through the same periods of birth, growth, and demise. Impermanence ensures that no dynasty can exist forever. Impermanence leads societies from prosperity to decline, completing the cycle of flourishing and waning. The first emperor Qin Shi Huang unified China, but his dream of a lasting legacy barely extended beyond two generations. But from another perspective, impermanence also promotes the progress and development of society. It is precisely because of impermanence that humanity has been able to evolve from primitive society to slave-owning society, feudal society, capitalist society, and socialist society.

The wealth we diligently seek is also impermanent. Many strive to accumulate riches by any means necessary, even resorting to dishonest methods. They wish to enjoy this wealth themselves and pass it on to their descendants, hoping it will last for generations. Yet, they overlook that wealth is also subject to the Law of Impermanence. According to Buddhist teachings, wealth is subject to five major vulnerabilities: it can be taken by floods, destroyed

by fire, stolen by thieves, and confiscated by authorities. Finally, if these do not deplete it, then often, a wealthy family will have unworthy descendants who squander the hard-earned fortune, quickly dissipating their ancestors' efforts. As the saying goes, "Wealth does not last more than three generations." History shows that it is indeed rare for a family to maintain its wealth forever.

The world we live in is also impermanent. For thousands of years, humankind has been striving to develop science and technology to build the world, evolving from ignorance and backwardness to today's high level of civilization. Impermanence drives progress and development in the world but also leads civilization towards destruction. This is because the Earth, upon which we depend for survival, undergoes the processes of formation, existence, destruction, and emptiness. When it trends towards destruction, can human civilization still exist? As a Chinese saying goes: "If the skin does not exist, how can the hair cling to it?"

3) Believing in the Dependently Originated and Empty Nature

Dependent Origination, a central tenet that permeates Buddhist teachings, stands at the heart of the Buddha Dharma. Unlike the deterministic causality posited by fatalists, the Buddhist perspective on causation is grounded in the Law of Dependent Origination. According to this principle, every outcome is the product of a web of causes and conditions interacting with one another. This principle also applies to the nature of impermanence: since every phenomenon arises from a temporary convergence of causes and conditions, its existence is inherently transient and uncertain. Dependent Origination also dictates the development of all phenomena in the universe. As stated in the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, a foundational text of the Three-Treatise School, “There are no things that do not arise from interdependence.” Thus, nothing in the universe comes into being through divine creation or sheer coincidence; every existence is predicated upon specific causes and conditions.

The concept of Dependent Origination mainly involves four types of conditions: the casual condition, the predominant condition, the object condition, and the immediate antecedent condition. Thus, “all dharma arises from four conditions.”

The causal condition is the first and most direct factor in a phenomenon. For instance, if we sow a seed in the ground, the seed is the proximate causal condition of the plant's growth.

The second is the predominant condition, or external factor which promotes the development of an object. For example, the growth of a seed requires conditions such as soil, water, labor and sunlight.

The third factor is the object condition. This refers to the external object that our consciousness acts upon or the necessary condition for a consciousness to function. For example, the function of eye consciousness requires a visible object, and that of ear consciousness requires an

audible object. The visible and the audible objects are the object condition. The object condition is an important factor for consciousness to arise.

The fourth one is the immediate condition. Thoughts flow like water, one thought following another in succession. In mental activity, two different thoughts can't occur simultaneously; a subsequent thought can only arise after the previous one has ceased. Thus, the previous thought is the immediate condition for the arising of the following thought.

Nothing in the universe will come into being without causes and conditions. For example, a table is made of nails, wood, paint, and a carpenter's work. Our body is also a combination of the Five Aggregates. Form, the first aggregate, refers to matter, that is, human organs of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The other four aggregates, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, are various mental activities with consciousness being the central part of mental activity. Every occurrence

of mental activity requires a combination of numerous causes and conditions. For instance, eye consciousness occurs under nine conditions: light, space, objects, observation, the seed, the sense organ, consciousness, the Manas consciousness, and the Alaya consciousness. Only when complete with the nine conditions can eye consciousness arise.

It can be seen from above that everything, from consciousness to the universe, comes from the unification of numerous causes and conditions. When the Buddha told us to observe the world according to the Law of Dependent Origination, he wanted us to penetrate through the surface of all phenomena and reach its empty nature. Here is a Gatha from the *Treatise on the Middle Way*:

Phenomena arise from causes and conditions,
I say they are “emptiness.”
They are also conventionally named,
And this represents the Middle Way.

Why are all phenomena arising from causes and conditions empty? Because they have no self-nature. Self-nature refers to an entity that is not dependent on causes and conditions, unchanging and fixed. Let's go back to the example mentioned previously. The table depends on conditions like carpentry, wood, and nails, without which there is no table. Likewise, the wood of the table is made up of elements like earth, water, fire, and wind, without which there is no wood. Human bodies are the provisional coalescence of the Five Aggregates, without these aggregates, what then are humans?

Thus, it shows that all things originating from causes and conditions do not have a fixed and unchanging essence. In fact, the immediate present moment of dependent arising is inherently empty. But we should also understand that emptiness does not negate phenomena. We must be aware of the empty nature of all phenomena as well as the false appearance of all phenomena. This is the correct understanding in accordance with the Middle Way.

In Prajna sutras, we are consistently asked to observe everything in accordance with the Middle Way. The *Heart Sutra* tells us, “When Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva was practicing the profound Prajna Paramita, he illuminated the Five Skandhas and saw that they are all empty, and he crossed beyond all suffering and difficulty. Shariputra, form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. The form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form.”

The Sutra mainly tells us that the Dependent Origination and the emptiness of self-nature are non-dual. This is the Buddhas and bodhisattvas’ deep insight into the essence of the world and life based on wisdom. “Form itself is emptiness, and emptiness itself is form” means that the phenomena of the Dependent Origination and the emptiness of self-nature are one. Many people do not have an adequate understanding of what “emptiness” really means in Buddha Dharma. Some think that emptiness exists outside of form, or that form must be annihilated for emptiness to be present, leading to various misunderstandings

about emptiness. However, the emptiness in the Dharma is actually based on the dependently originated existence. One cannot seek emptiness apart from Dependent Origination. “He crossed beyond all suffering and difficulty” signifies that only by recognizing the Law of Dependent Origination can we truly eliminate all afflictions.

2. Not Dwelling in Forms

Sentient beings give rise to afflictions because they dwell in false appearance, and thereby generate karma, leading to various forms of suffering. To achieve liberation from this, we must give up all attachments to false appearances. How can we achieve this?

First, we must see through everything with wisdom, accept the Law of Cause and Effect and the Law of Impermanence, and realize that emptiness is unattainable. Only by penetrating the truth of all things can we avoid being confused by their false appearances. Only in the same way can we avoid greed, hatred, and ignorance, and the

suffering that attachments bring.

In the *Diamond Sutra*, as we all know, Subhuti asked the Buddha, “If a good man, or good woman, resolves their mind on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi (supreme enlightenment), how should they dwell, and how should they subdue their minds?” The whole sutra focuses on the answers to the two questions: “How should they dwell?” refers to how practitioners’ minds should remain; “How should they subdue their minds?” pertains to what methods should be used to subdue our minds.

The reply from the Buddha is, “Cultivate a mind that clings to nothing.” “Clinging to nothing” means not abiding in any forms.

When practicing giving, a bodhisattva should not attach to any forms. Just as the *Diamond Sutra* says, “One should practice giving without abiding in anything, that is, giving without attachment to form, sound, taste, touch, or phenomena.” Otherwise, what happens? “If a

bodhisattva's mind abides in phenomena while giving, it's like a person walking in darkness, seeing nothing. If a bodhisattva's mind does not abide in phenomena while giving, it's a person with eyes, in bright daylight, seeing various colors." Giving without attachment to any forms means observing the emptiness of the giver, receiver, and gift. That is, a bodhisattva should not be attached to the self who is giving, the one who is receiving, and the things given. If one attaches to any form when giving, the giving is limited, and so is the merit; if he does not dwell in forms when giving, the giving is unlimited, and the merit is as immeasurable as the void.

A bodhisattva must also not attach to appearances when liberating sentient beings. "Of all the classes of sentient beings, whether born from an egg, from a womb, from moisture, or from metamorphosis; whether with form or without form; whether with consciousness or without consciousness, or neither possess nor lack consciousness, I lead them all into nirvana without remainder, liberating them. After liberating immeasurable, innumerable, and

infinite sentient beings, a bodhisattva sees that in reality, no sentient beings are liberated. Why is this so? If a bodhisattva holds to the forms of self, others, sentient beings, and everything, then they are not a bodhisattva.” Bodhisattvas liberate all sentient beings but must not abide in the forms of liberating beings, a self who liberates, or the sentient beings being liberated. If a bodhisattva holds to the forms of self or sentient beings while liberating others, they are not qualified as a bodhisattva.

While practicing the Dharma, one must also not attach to any forms. “Why is that? Because if sentient beings cling to forms, they are attached to the notion of self, others, sentient beings, and longevity; if they cling to the forms of Dharma, they are attached to the notion of self, others, sentient beings, and longevity; if they cling to the forms of non-Dharma, they are attached to the notion of self, others, sentient beings, and longevity. Therefore, one should not cling to Dharma, nor should one cling to non-Dharma. For this reason, Tathagata always says: ‘All you Bhikkhus should know that the Dharma

which I speak is like a raft. Even the Dharma should be relinquished, to say nothing of non-Dharma.’” Usually, people are attached to worldly things before learning the Dharma, but become attached to the Dharma after learning it. In reality, any attachment will become an obstacle to practice, just as gold and sand grains will do the same harm to the eyes. Therefore, when cultivating the Dharma, we should not cling to either worldly forms or the teachings themselves.

Similarly, while practicing and realizing the Dharma, one must also not attach to any forms. A Srotaapanna (stream-enterer) does not cling to the form of having attained the fruit of Srotaapanna; a Sakrdagamin (once-returner) does not cling to the form of having attained the fruit of Sakrdagamin; an Anagamin (non-returner) does not cling to the form of having attained the fruit of Anagamin; and an arhat does not cling to the form of having attained the fruit of arhat. If an arhat thinks “I have attained the fruit of arhat,” they are clinging to the forms of the self, others, sentient beings and everything.

The *Diamond Sutra* once again tells us, “Subhuti! As to Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, there is not even the slightest Dharma that I could attain.” The four stages of sainthood (stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, and arhat) are the goals of cultivation for sravakas (voice-hearers), while Anuttarasamyaksambodhi is supreme Buddhahood. Practitioners of the three vehicles, in their process of cultivation and realization, use the wisdom of prajna to realize the true nature of all dharmas, where subject and object are both extinguished, with neither wisdom nor attainment to be found. If one clings to forms and discriminates falsely, they are already far from the truth.

In every way, the *Diamond Sutra* reminds us not to attach to any forms. “All forms are delusional.” “Detaching from all forms is what makes a Buddha.” “True nature of forms is no form.” “For all dharmas, one should not attach to their forms. One should thus know, thus view, thus believe and understand the Dharma.” “If one sees me in form, if one seeks me in sound, this person practices a wrongful path and cannot see the Tathagata.” To

realize the true nature, one must observe everything with prajna wisdom: “The body or appearance of the Tathagata is, in fact, not a body or appearance,” “Adorning the Buddha-land is not adorning, hence it is called adorning,” “The Tathagata speaks of the thirty-two marks as no marks; they are called the thirty-two marks,” “What is called ‘sentient beings’ is not sentient beings; they are called sentient beings.” By observing so, one can give rise to a mind that does not abide in anything.

When Chan Buddhism was transmitted to the Fifth Patriarch, the *Diamond Sutra* began to be used as a guide for cultivation and realization. Afterwards, the Sixth Patriarch had a great enlightenment upon hearing the phrase, “Give rise to a mind that does not abide in anything.” His verse of enlightenment, “Originally, Bodhi has no tree, the bright mirror has no stand. Originally there is not a single thing. Where can dust alight?” perfectly reflects the principle of the formlessness of prajna. The *Platform Sutra* of the Sixth Patriarch also teaches the practice of non-abidance to disciples of later generations. Regarding

the distinction between afflictions and Bodhi, the Patriarch said, "Past thoughts attached to states of being are afflictions, and future thoughts separate from states of being are Bodhi." The difference between afflictions and Bodhi lies merely in the thought of attachment or detachment. Abiding in forms is affliction, while not abiding in forms is Bodhi.

As for seeing the Buddha-nature and realizing Buddhahood, the Sixth Patriarch said, "Worldly people have 84,000 kinds of afflictions. If there are no afflictions, wisdom is always present, not departing from one's true nature. Those who understand this Dharma are in a state of no-thought, no-remembrance, non-attachment, and non-production of falsehood. Use your true-suchness nature, observe with wisdom, neither grasping nor rejecting all dharmas, this is to see one's nature and realize the Buddhahood." It is also said, "If one is enlightened to the Sudden Teaching, not clinging to external practices, but constantly giving rise to the right views within one's mind, afflictions and troubles can never stain, this is seeing your

nature.” Everyone inherently possesses Buddha-nature, but it cannot reveal itself because of our inner afflictions and troubles. If we become not attached to forms, Buddha-nature can manifest itself.

Regarding the practice and realization of the Dharma, the Sixth Patriarch also summarized the three main principles of Chan Buddhism with the concept of cultivating a mind that abides in nothing: “From the beginning, this Dharma gate of mine has been based on no-thought as its essence, no-form as its nature, and non-abiding as its foundation.” No-thought means the mind is not tainted by any phenomena, and that is no-thought; no-form means the true nature has no form, and practitioners must detach from all forms, not grasping any forms, to realize the pure Dharma nature; non-abiding means not dwelling on past thoughts in moment-to-moment awareness, not abiding in any dharmas, the mind does not abide in any phenomena, and that is non-abiding.

Regarding actual practices, Chan Buddhism differs from

other schools in its methods. When practicing sitting meditation, practitioners have traditionally emphasized the sitting posture. However, the Sixth Patriarch rebuked them for doing so. The *Platform Sutra* says, “The Way should flow freely; why should it be obstructed? If the mind does not abide in dharmas, the Way flows freely; if the mind abides in dharmas, it is called self-binding. If someone claims that constant sitting without moving is the Way, they are just like Shariputra, who was rebuked by Vimalakirti while sitting tranquilly in the forest. Good Knowing Advisers, some teach sitting meditation, observing the mind and contemplating stillness, unmoving and unarising, claiming this as the practice. The deluded do not understand, and take this as the ultimate, such people are many. Such teachings are greatly mistaken.” The Way is realized by cultivating a mind that does not abide anywhere; clinging to the form of sitting will surely not lead to the realization of the Great Way. It is said, “Born sitting without lying, dying lying without sitting, just a set of stinking bones, what use is it to establish merits?”

Master Huairang, a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch in Nanyue, did not favor the idea of simply sitting for meditation, either. When Mazu Daoyi was sitting in meditation in Nanyue, Master Huairang, believing he was a vessel of the Dharma, approached him to inquire:

“What do you seek by sitting in meditation, master?”

“To become a Buddha,” replied Daoyi.

Then, Master Huairang picked up a brick and began grinding it on a stone.

Daoyi was confused, “What are you doing?”

“I am grinding the brick to make a mirror.” replied Huairang.

Daoyi became puzzled, “How can you make a mirror by grinding a brick?”

Huirang said, "If a mirror cannot be made by grinding a brick, how can one become a Buddha by sitting in meditation?"

Daoyi felt even more puzzled, asking, "What should I do then?"

Huirang explained, "It is like a bull pulling a cart. If the cart does not move, should you whip the cart or the bull? Similarly, you hope to become a Buddha by sitting in meditation, but Chan is not confined to sitting or lying down, and Buddha has no fixed forms. In the principle of non-abidance, one should not cling nor reject. If you cling to the form of sitting, not only will you not understand Chan, but you will also never achieve Buddhahood."

When practicing Chan meditation, one must not let the mind abide in anything. Before the rise of Chan Buddhism, the prevalent Theravada meditation practices involved fixing the mind on objects. However, Chan Buddhism emphasizes that in sitting meditation, the mind

should not abide in anything. The *Platform Sutra* states, “In our practice of sitting meditation, we fundamentally do not cling to the mind, nor do we cling to purity, nor is it about being motionless.” If you cling to the mind, but the mind itself is illusory; knowing the illusory nature of the mind, what is there to cling to? If you cling to purity, the Buddha-nature itself is inherently pure, only appearing impure due to delusional thoughts obscuring the true nature. Clinging to the form of purity is in itself a delusion.

When the Sixth Patriarch decided to guide Huairang, Huairang bowed to pay homage. Then the Patriarch asked, “Where do you come from?”

He replied, “From Mount Song.”

The Patriarch asked, “What thing is it, and how does it come?”

He replied, “To say that it is like a thing is to miss the point.”

The Patriarch said, "Then, can it still be cultivated and realized?"

He replied, "The practice is to attain emptiness. But it is unattainable when tainted."

The Patriarch said, "It is precisely this untainted thing that is guarded by all Buddhas. You are like this, and I am like this, too."

The koan shows that, when cultivating the Way, one should maintain an untainted mind, not abiding in any forms.

Chan masters also examine whether each other is attached to forms. One day, when Zhaozhou was traveling in Tiantai, he came across Hanshan. Seeing a cow's hoof prints, Hanshan said, "Did you see the cow?"

Zhaozhou replied, "No, I didn't."

Pointing at the hoof prints, Hanshan said, “These are the footprints left by five hundred arhats wandering the mountain.”

Zhaozhou asked, “If they are arhats, why would they leave cow hoof prints?”

Hanshan said, “Vast sky, vast sky.”

Zhaozhou burst into laughter.

Hanshan asked, “What are you laughing at?”

Zhaozhou replied, “Vast sky, vast sky.”

In the eyes of ordinary people, the dialogue seems irrational, but it reveals the difference between Chan masters and ordinary people. Ordinary people are attached to forms, thus insisting that a cow’s hoof prints is just a cow’s hoof prints, and an arhat’s footprints is an arhat’s footprints, while Chan masters see everything as it truly

is in its own nature. In their Dharma-nature, the cow's hoof prints are the arhat's footprints, and the arhat's footprints are the cow's hoof prints.

In life, Chan practitioners also neither cling to nor reject anything, not abiding in forms. Chan master Huixiu wore the same pair of shoes for thirty years; Chan master Fachang in Damei did not eat vegetables cultivated from plowing; Chan master Xuanlang in Zuoxi always lived an ascetic life, sheltering himself under rocks and cladding in the same robe for over forty years; Chan master Tonghui entered Mount Taibai without carrying provisions, lived under a tree, ate wild fruits when hungry, drank from springs when thirsty, and never changed his patched robe for life; Chan master Zhize, with an unrestrained personality, had nothing in his house except a bedsheet, a bowl, and a wooden spoon, and never closed his door.

Chan practitioners embody their practice in a simple life, finding enlightenment in everyday tasks such as eating, dressing, tea picking, and wood chopping. They minimize

material desires yet find infinite joy in their spiritual practice. When you ask Chan masters how to practice the Way, they will tell you: “Eat, sleep, and drink tea.” But the way Chan practitioners eat and dress is different from us. Ordinary people don’t fully engage in eating, being picky and distracted; they don’t sleep well, toss and turn when sleeping, filled with endless thoughts and restlessness. In contrast, Chan practitioners are not attached to the forms of eating or dressing, adapt effortlessly to circumstances, and live in ease and comfort.

Not abiding in forms is the key to liberating oneself from the sufferings of life. The *Heart Sutra* teaches us to use the wisdom of prajna to observe everything, realizing that all phenomena are unattainable. This leads to a mind free from attachments; without attachments, there is no fear. Thus, one can move away from deluded dreams and ultimately reach nirvana. Nirvana is the complete cessation of afflictions. Only by realizing nirvana can one truly liberate oneself from the cycle of life and death.

3. Extinguishing Delusions

Many people attribute their suffering to external conditions such as poor health, poverty, or social injustice. However, these are merely external causes of suffering; its true root lies within the mind. Our inner world is filled with various delusions, including the aforementioned wrong views, superstitions, attachments, greed, hatred, and erroneous views. It is these delusions that deprive us of inner peace, trapping us in an endless cycle of pursuit, seeking various stimulations, and sometimes even engaging in irrational actions. To be free from suffering, one must extinguish these delusions.

How can we extinguish delusions? Many beginners in meditation often say that they have too many wandering thoughts during meditation and cannot calm down, asking if there is any way to overcome this. Of course, there is a way, but first, we must examine why these delusions arise. Thoughts are continuous; if we wish to meditate with undivided attention, we must always be mindful in

our daily lives. The most frequent and intense delusions that arise during meditation are undoubtedly those to which we are most attached in our daily lives. To strengthen our meditation practice, we must live without clinging to anything, letting all experiences pass through like wild geese flying across the sky or wind blowing through bamboo leaves, leaving no trace. When the mind is purified, naturally, there will be no chain of wandering thoughts during meditation.

Chanting the Buddha's name can also extinguish delusions. People often mistakenly think that chanting the Buddha's name is a practice only for the elderly or that it is a way of praying for Buddha's blessings. Here's a story about a grandmother who chants the Buddha's name all day, and her grandson, annoyed by the constant chanting, starts calling out "Grandma, Grandma" incessantly. Irritated, the grandmother asks why he keeps calling her, and the grandson replies, "You get annoyed when I call you a few times, but you chant the Buddha's name non-stop, doesn't that annoy the Buddha?" This story

reflects the common misunderstanding about chanting the Buddha's name. In fact, chanting the Buddha's name aims to regulate one's mind and extinguish delusions, as it is said, "When clear water droplets are dropped into murky water, the murky water must turn clear; when the Buddha's name enters the mind of delusion, the deluded mind must turn towards Buddha-nature." As stated in the *Maha-Stamaprapta Bodhisattva's Preachment on Being Mindful of the Buddha*, "Gathering all six senses, with successive pure mindfulness, attains samadhi. This is foremost." Thus, chanting the Buddha's name is indeed an effective remedy to combat delusions.

Cessation and contemplation can extinguish delusions. Cessation, from the Sanskrit "Samatha," means calming the scattered mind and concentrating it on one point; Contemplation, from the Sanskrit "Vipassana," involves observation of external phenomena. There are distinctions between Theravada and Mahayana Samatha-Vipassana. Theravada practice involves focusing on a single sense, such as mindfulness of breathing, so one

can focus on the breath and perceive its coming and going, length, temperature, and depth. By concentrating the mind on the breath, one can realize that the mind and breath are interconnected with each other. So, the breath moves from coarse to subtle, and finally to the absence of breath, thereby extinguishing delusions. Mahayana Samatha-Vipassana, on the other hand, is based on generating the bodhicitta (the mind of enlightenment) and accomplishes the meditation on emptiness from the Mahayana viewpoint.

Observing the mind can extinguish delusions. The mind flows continuously like water, and ordinary people, lacking observation, always run around following their thoughts. Observing the mind is to realize the illusory nature of thoughts. What is the mind, after all? It is nothing more than a series of experiences and concepts. Thus, the *Diamond Sutra* tells us: “The past mind is unattainable, the present mind is unattainable, and the future mind is unattainable.” This perspective reveals the nature of the mind through the perspective of time. The unattainable

past mind signifies that the past has already passed and there is no need to dwell in reminiscence; the unattainable future mind signifies that the future has not yet arrived and there is no need to chase after it. In the moment between the passing of the previous thought and the arising of the next thought, maintain this clear and bright state of mind, as stated: “When the arising and ceasing cease, tranquility is revealed.” The *Shurangama Sutra* says, “When the restless mind ceases, enlightenment ensues.” Master Linji stated: “How to cease the stream of thoughts constantly running without ceasing? Only the true mind, as boundless as the void, can cut off the stream. Detached from forms and names, the true mind remains unrecognized by the unenlightened. For the enlightened, the wholesome thoughts must be constantly cultivated, just like ‘a precious sword requires sharpening after each use.’” All of these are to teach us to recognize our true mind through observing the mind.

Investigating a topic can also extinguish delusions. This is one of the important cultivation methods in Chan

Buddhism. Common topics involve the following questions: Who is chanting the Buddha's name? What was my original face before birth? In the state of no dreams and no thoughts, who is the master? What is it before no thought arises? When investigating a topic, we cannot annotate or deduce it; we cannot wait for enlightenment; we cannot abandon it to seek peace; we cannot reason with ourselves; instead, we should get to the bottom of it, leaving aside what is happening outside. Chan master Huanglong offered a metaphor to explain the investigation, "Like a nimble cat catching a mouse, its eyes unblinking, all senses directed forward, from head to tail in perfect alignment."

The investigation highlights "doubts." As the ancient masters put it, "Great doubt leads to great enlightenment; little doubt to little enlightenment; no doubt, no enlightenment." One must become fully immersed in the investigation of these questions, like a "living dead person." Without reaching this state, one is not yet on the path. When one delves deeply into the topic of inquiry, concentrating on a single thought with undivided attention,

delusions naturally cease to arise.

Delusions are the root of suffering. To fundamentally eliminate suffering, we must start by extinguishing delusions. When delusions are effectively controlled, we will not be swayed by them, thus maintaining a peaceful mind. When we are not distracted by delusions, we can enhance concentration and efficiency in learning and work. When we are not disturbed by delusions, we can focus our mind in one place and improve our ability of concentration; and our Buddha-nature will not be obscured by delusions, allowing our true nature to emerge and wisdom to develop. Therefore, the importance of extinguishing delusions cannot be overlooked.

4. Knowing Oneself

At a macroscopic level, technological advances enable humans to know about other planets and even travel through space. At a microscopic level, we can directly explore the structure of matter and uncover the secrets of

genetics. Unfortunately, none of those achievements can help humans to understand ourselves further.

If we cannot have a clear understanding of ourselves, we cannot control our thoughts, nor can we observe and eliminate afflictions at the moment they arise. If we want to free ourselves from suffering, we should first know ourselves. How can we know ourselves? The ancient masters told us that realizing our Buddha-nature is knowing ourselves. In our lives, bodies are not truly ours, but merely a temporary combination of the four elements; our thoughts are not truly ours, but just a continuation of concepts. Beyond these physical and mental aspects, what is the “self”?

When the Buddha attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree, he exclaimed in wonder: “How marvelous! All sentient beings have the wisdom and virtues of the Tathagata but cannot attain them because of their attachments and delusions.” Aside from delusions and attachments, our minds also have the pure wisdom and virtues of the

Tathagata. So, to take direct responsibility for ourselves means recognizing our inherent Buddha-nature.

When Chan master Huihai of Dazhu visited Mazu Daoyi, Daoyi asked, “Why are you coming here?”

Huihai replied, “To seek the Dharma.”

Daoyi said, “What Dharma? I have nothing here. Why abandon your own treasure and seek elsewhere?”

Huihai was puzzled, “What is my treasure?”

Daoyi replied, “The one who is asking me is your treasure. It is endowed with everything, rather than devoid of anything. It can be used freely as you want. Why do you seek it elsewhere?”

Illuminated by Daoyi, Huihai realized his true self at that very moment.

Later, someone asked Huihai, “What is a Buddha?”

He replied, “If you’re not a Buddha, then who is?”

Here is another example. One day, Chan Master Lingxun called on Chan Master Guizong. He asked, “What is a Buddha?”

Guizong said, “I’m afraid you won’t believe it if I tell you about it.”

Lingxun asked, “How dare I doubt a great master’s teaching?”

Guizong said, “You are a Buddha.”

What is a Buddha? It is the true essence of our self, our Buddha-nature.

Although our Buddha-nature is not the deluded consciousness that can see, hear, feel, and know, they are not

separate from seeing, hearing, feeling and knowing. Chan Master Yunmen said, "The consciousness of seeing and hearing are not their true nature. The true nature cannot be presented to you through any sound or any form. If you understand the true nature of emptiness, why make a difference between nature and consciousness?" In order to know ourselves, we should directly take the responsibility of the consciousness that can see and hear, but not abide in the form of seeing and hearing.

Not falling into conceptual thinking is to understand oneself. Generally, thinking is a continuation of names and concepts, a re-presentation of past impressions. Once we fall into discriminative thought, entangled in concepts of right and wrong, gain and loss, we will lose our true nature. Here is an anecdote to illustrate it.

Chan master Linji, elucidated the teachings in the Dharma hall, "In your fleshly mass resides a true person of no position, constantly coming in and out through the gates of

your face. Those who have not yet become enlightened, see it.”

A monk asked, “What is the true person of no position?”

The Master grabbed him and said, “Speak, speak!”

After the monk pondered for a moment, the Master let him go and remarked, “What kind of dry shit-stick is the true person of no position?”

Similarly, there is the case of Huiming’s encounter with the Sixth Patriarch.

After receiving the robe and bowl from the Fifth Patriarch, the Sixth Patriarch fled southward, with Huiming in pursuit. The Sixth Patriarch placed the robe and bowl on a rock, which Huiming couldn’t lift, prompting him to declare, “I came for the Dharma, not the robe.”

The Sixth Patriarch responded, “If you’ve come for

the Dharma, let go of everything and don't let a single thought arise.”

He further asked, “Without thinking of good or evil, at this very moment, what is your original face?”

Huiming then recognized his true self.

The two cases teach us that only by stepping away from our usual patterns of discriminative thought can we truly come to know ourselves.

To understand oneself, one must see the true nature of the mind itself. The mind refers to the present thoughts, which are illusory, constantly arising and ceasing. However, beyond this form of arising and ceasing lies the true nature of the mind, neither arising nor ceasing. To see the true nature of the mind, we must realize the illusory nature of thoughts without being deceived by their changes, so we can see our pure mind and true existence.

When the Sixth Patriarch attained enlightenment under the Fifth Patriarch, he declared, “All dharmas do not depart from the self-nature. No matter when, the self-nature is originally pure. No matter when, the self-nature is originally unborn and undying. No matter when, the self-nature is originally complete. No matter when, the self-nature is originally immovable. No matter when, the self-nature can give rise to all dharmas.” The Fifth Patriarch, recognizing that the Sixth Patriarch had realized his true nature, further explained to him, “Without recognizing one’s own mind, studying the Buddha’s teachings is of no benefit. If one realizes the original mind, one will become a great being, a teacher of humans and heavenly beings, a Buddha.”

Since the beginningless time, sentient beings, due to not knowing themselves, have been mistaking the thieves for their children, and sinking into the six realms because of delusions. If we recognize our self-nature, we can extinguish delusions and afflictions, and will not be swayed by the external changing conditions. Thus, we can unlock

our inherent wisdom, fundamentally control our destiny,
perfect our character, and achieve great freedom.

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