



静心学堂丛书

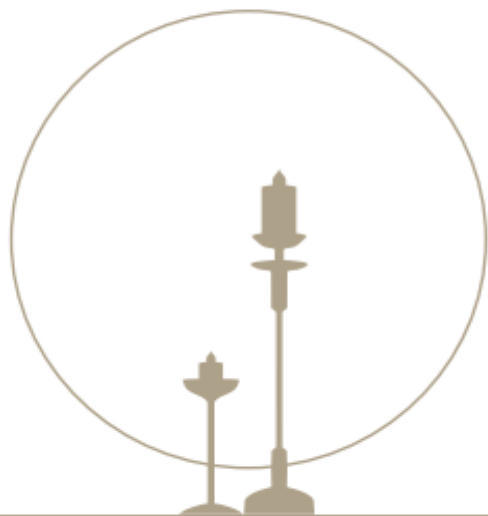
The Mindful Peace Academy Collection

中英双语 Chinese-English Edition

# 「断舍离」 从佛法视角谈

Discussing “Decluttering” from a Buddhist Perspective

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大千出版社

2022年8月讲于甘露别院正念堂

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我们的生活美学推出了“断舍离”的项目，很有意义。断舍离的概念流行已久，大家应该听说过，也有人不同程度地实践过。为了项目的开展，我和项目组做了一些沟通，也在网络查询相关资料，发现断舍离正和我们倡导的禅意空间、静心慢生活相吻合。

禅意空间的特质，不仅是体现某种风格，更重要的，是传达相应的生活理念乃至人生态度。在设计上，“空”是其指导思想和特色所在。别院的各个空间，从材料选择、物品陈设到色彩搭配，无不遵循简约的原则。身处这样的空间，心就容易静下来。同时我们也发现，禅意空间对使用者的要求很高。如果缺乏素养，不能善加使用和维护，再好的空间也会逐渐走样，

最终像仓库般凌乱不堪。这就必须保持简约、有序的生活，才能与禅意空间相得益彰，彼此滋养。简约，即东西少，否则就无法空灵；有序，即作息规律，物品整齐，使用后各归其位。这是打造禅意生活的关键，也是断舍离的核心。后者的长处在于，为我们提供了具体的操作细节和实践经验。

进一步，我们还要看到断舍离蕴含的修行高度。断舍离的关键是舍，修行也是不断舍弃贪著的过程，正如《入菩萨行论》所说：“舍尽则脱苦，吾心成涅槃。”贪著无非两种，一是对自我的贪著，一是对世界的贪著，又称我执和法执。当我们对自我和世界不再有任何贪著，才能成就解脱，走向觉醒。带着这样的见地修断舍离，就是和解脱相应的法门。

所以说，断舍离既能提升生活品质，还能增上修行，净化身心，是世间法和佛法的有效结合。

# 一、何为断舍离

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“断舍离”有三层含义

一是断

断绝不需要的东西

包括不购买、不收取

二是舍

舍弃多余、无用的物品

三是离

脱离对物品乃至欲望的执著

## 1. 断舍离的缘起

断舍离的概念，是日本杂物管理咨询师山下英子在 2000 年提出的。其后，她在各地举办讲座，影响日增，并于 2009 年出版专著《断舍离》。本书 2013 年传入中国后，引起极大反响，累计印量达数百万册。

为什么断舍离会引起那么多共鸣？因为它针对现代人普遍存在的问题，提出了一系列解决措施。当代社会物质丰富，我们拥有的衣物和用品，可能是古人的百千倍之多。很多人家中塞满东西，需要时却遍寻不得，严重影响生活品质。基于这一状况，出现了专事整理的从业者，帮助大家清理并收纳物品。但如果不能从根本上改变生活方式，继续不断地买买买，这



种整理是难以长期奏效的。

山下英子在大学期间就学习瑜伽，她受印度瑜伽哲学的影响，从“断行、舍行、离行”的思想中，提炼出“断舍离”的理念。通常所说的断舍离，局限于对物品的处理，事实上，它还关系到我们的生活方式，关系到人生观、价值观、世界观。只有依断行、舍行、离行的指导调整生活，取舍得当，才能使物品为我所用。否则，往往在不知不觉中就被海量的物品包围。

## 2. 断舍离的含义

“断舍离”有三层含义。一是断，断绝不需要的东西，包括不购买、不收取。这就需要明确，哪些是自己真正需要的。看看我们的周围，究竟有多少是必需品？很可能，整个生活都被可有可无的东西包围着。二是舍，舍弃多余、无用的物品。三是离，脱离对物品乃至欲望的执著。

三者是有次第的。断，是不制造问题；舍，是处理已有问题；离，是铲除问题根源。

断舍离源于印度的文化传统。印度宗教众多，思想各异，但普遍以轮回和解脱为核心。他们认为轮回是痛苦的，人之所以落入轮回，是因为欲望的束缚。只有断除欲望，才能摆脱轮回，导向解脱。基于此，这些宗教强调禁欲和苦行，希望通过自苦其身来断欲并解脱。据说，至今仍有 500 多万人在修苦行，有人高举右手 40 多年不放下，还有人持牛戒、狗戒、猪戒，过着动物般的生活。不仅印度如此，世界其他宗教也曾在不同程度上崇尚苦行，以此对治欲望。那么，佛教是怎么看待这个问题的？

佛陀修行之初，也经历过艰苦卓绝的自我折磨，最终发现苦行并不究竟，所以提倡中道。一方面要少欲知足，摆脱追逐欲望的本能；一方面要远离无益苦行，即单纯为吃苦而吃苦的、无意义的极端行为。而对有益解脱的苦行，佛陀是认可的。如早期提出的四依、头陀行等，在世人看来也近乎苦行，但目的是为了断除贪欲，精进修行。

此后，佛陀又根据众生根机制定了一系列戒律，如别解脱戒、菩萨戒等。制戒的目的，是通过对行为

和生活方式的规范，为修行营造清净的心灵氛围。在此基础上，才能进一步得定发慧。

戒包含“此应作”和“此不应作”。从某种意义上说，断舍离也有戒的内涵，即“此应舍”和“此应取”。在清理物品的过程中，我们要观察内心的取舍，以此梳理人生。这将直接关系到我们怎么生活，怎么看世界，怎么选择未来。所以断舍离是可深可浅的，可以是整理技术，也可以是生活哲学、人生智慧。在佛法正见的指导下，还可以和解脱相应。

## 二、断舍离的对象

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今天  
整个环境都是和贪嗔痴相应的  
特别需要对身口意三业  
作出断舍离  
舍弃没价值的放逸行为  
建立有意义、有规律的正念生活

断舍离，到底断什么？我们通常想到的，是把多余物品扔掉或送掉。其实，这只是第一步。这三个字蕴含的哲学，还包括对人生方方面面的审视，主要有以下六个方面。

## 1. 生活用品

受西方生活方式的影响，整个世界都在无节制地开发资源，提高产能。有些厂家要求业绩逐年翻番，今年做 100 亿，明年做 200 亿。为了完成业绩，每年得卖掉几亿件衣服，这就必须不断刺激消费。过去，是因为有人需要买，厂家才生产衣服。现在却是厂家

为了卖，让你觉得自己还需要衣服。这个需要是怎么产生的？主播带货、商家炒作、时尚潮流、基于大数据的精准推送……总有一种方式，会让你不停地买买买，于是房间就堆进了数以百计的衣服和鞋。结果是，有的连吊牌都没拆过，就被直接丢弃了。

从衣物本身的功能来说，我们真正需要的有多少？一年四季，能穿几件衣，穿几双鞋？有人以为，花自己的钱买东西，理直气壮。却没想到，这种过度消费是在耗用地球资源，耗用人类共同的福报。而资源是有限的，福报也是有限的，事实上，这种消耗已导致严重的生态危机，是天灾，更是人祸。

所以我们必须改变对消费的认识，准备买东西时，考虑一下，是不是自己真正需要的。很多时候，我们只是因为一念心动就买了，拥有后却发现并不是自己想要的，也没那么喜欢，甚至想不起究竟为什么要买。这一步很重要，只买自己需要的，物尽其用，才是对资源的有效利用。同时，也不会给生活制造不必要的累赘。

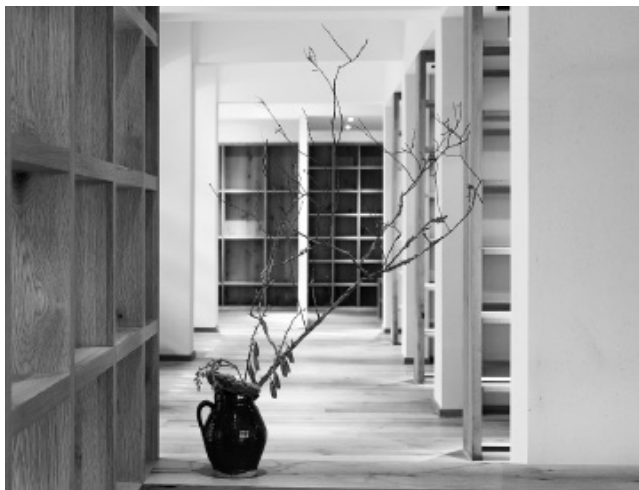
对此前已经制造的问题，要学会选择、整理和舍

弃，只留下确实有用的部分。这两天的课程会介绍一些具体做法，包括怎么对物品分类，怎么选择自己需要的，以及看待物品的正确态度。总之，物品只是生活的辅助，是给人带来方便而不是麻烦的。

## 2. 资身饮食

饮食是生存的基本需求，但也会带来疾病等隐患，所以古人有“病从口入”之说。现代的各项研究充分证明，不当饮食会引发众多疾病。据有关资料显示，中国的各类慢性病患者数量日增，未来5年间，用于医疗的费用将达8万亿。这是多么惊人的数字！在影响健康的因素中，除了作息混乱、压力过重、负面心态等问题，胡吃海塞带来的危害也不容忽视。

这就要对饮食作断舍离，知道哪些食物是有益健康的，哪些是需要避免的。比如肉食，且不说杀生的危害，仅从家畜的生长过程看，就问题重重。以前的家畜是自然生长的，但现在为了快速赢利，生长周期缩短了一半，甚至更多。为了催熟要用激素，为了防



病要用抗生素，短短几个月，它们在合成饲料和药物的相伴下，走上人类的餐桌。这样的肉食，积累了多少毒素，隐藏了多少危害？相比之下，虽然蔬菜也使用化肥和农药，但还可以清洗，可以选择有机或绿色无公害蔬菜，总体会更安全。

关于饮食的断舍离，主要有三点。

首先，选择健康的食物。食物是吃到肚子里的，还会参与全身的新陈代谢，不是放到抽屉不动的。一旦吃下去，想丢就不容易了。尤其是现在，某些商家



为了牟利不择手段，违规添加，必须慎重选择。同时要了解相关知识，一是选择适合自身体质的食物；二是学会健康烹饪，避免重油重盐重糖的危害；三是看懂配料表，少吃或不吃添加剂过多的深加工食品。当然适量也很重要，再健康的食物，只要超量就适得其反了。

其次，在合适的时间吃。古人说“不时不食”，这个时，包括三餐时间和食物时节。从养生的角度，早餐要吃好，午餐要吃饱，晚餐则少吃或不吃。佛教提倡过午不食，即使吃，也是作为服药那样，解决饥饿即可，不可贪味。但现在很多人正相反，早晨随便抓个东西边走边吃，起晚了干脆不吃；中午在单位对付一下；晚上却大吃一顿，不时还加顿夜宵。长此以往，势必影响消化、睡眠乃至免疫力，导致各种疾病或亚健康状态。此外，尽量选择自然成熟的当季作物，而不是反季节农产品。

第三，和食物保持一定距离。戒律规定，僧团要把用斋和存放食物的处所单独结界，即划定范围。只有在这个范围内才能吃东西，否则就不吃。这是有效

的阻断方式，否则，我们很容易在正餐外，不知不觉地吃下各种零食。尤其是现在，大部分零食含有多种添加剂，既增长贪欲，又损害健康。

做到这几点，可以建立正确的饮食习惯，在适合的时间，吃适宜、适量的食物。这点极其重要，因为饮食是人最基本的两大贪欲之一，稍有不慎就会落入串习。

### 3. 人际关系

走上社会，就伴随着各种人际关系，使人忙于应酬和各种活动。那么，这些交往对我们的生活、工作、人生成长有没有正向帮助？还是出于无聊或不会拒绝，结果为了应酬而应酬，为了活动而活动？怎么对这些关系作出审视？

“近朱者赤，近墨者黑”的古训，揭示了人际关系对成长的重要性。佛典也告诉我们，要选择善知识和善友，才于自身成长有益。如《瑜伽师地论》将“亲近善知识”作为四法行之首，《长阿含经》将“亲近

善友”作为三成法之先，是增上修行的重要助缘。反之，和狐朋狗友在一起，无非是吃喝玩乐，一味放逸，甚至沾染黄赌毒的恶习，走上犯罪道路。

这就必须作出选择。尤其在成长阶段，容易受环境影响，更要慎重对待。对善友，见贤思齐，虚心学习；对恶友，保持距离，以此为鉴；对非善非恶的普通关系，适度交往，不迎不拒。此外，有些情感纠葛不仅让自己痛苦，还会给他人带去麻烦，也要理智分析，当断则断，而不是沉沦其中。

作为学佛者，当我们有了一定的能力和定力，就要从利他的角度重新看待这个问题，不仅考虑对自己的帮助，更要考虑能给对方带去什么帮助。从发心上，可以扩大到一切众生，不论善恶都是我们利益的对象；从实际操作上，则要选择与己有缘者，即能够对他产生帮助的。如果不加选择，什么人都去帮，不仅难有效果，还可能产生副作用，白白耗费精力。所以慈悲是离不开智慧的，这样才能在不舍众生和审时度势中找到平衡，真正达到利他的效果。就像我们对不同的田地，要观察哪些可以播种，哪些需要开垦，哪

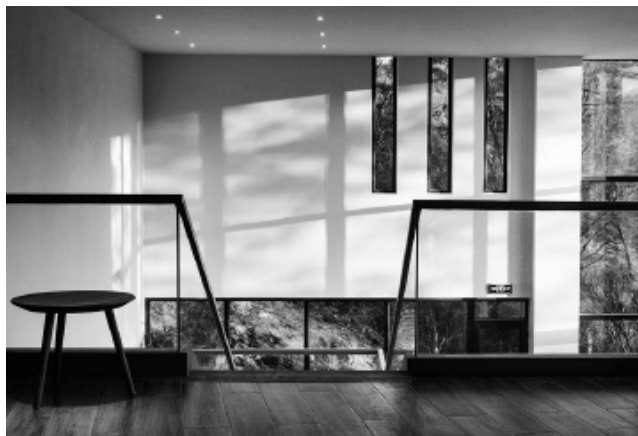
些只能暂时搁置。如果盲目播种，可能种子撒完了，结果却什么都长不出。

总之，人际关系要从自利和利他两方面来判断，定位不同，标准也不同。

#### 4. 言行举止

我们需要对生活加以审视，问问自己：从早到晚，时间是怎么安排的？做了哪些事？其中哪些是有价值的？哪些是真正需要做的？如果不加审视，时间会在不知不觉中就消耗了。和人闲聊，聊了半小时；打个妄想，打掉一小时；刷刷微信，逛逛淘宝，看看短视频，又过去几小时。事实上，这正是很多人的日常。尤其是手机普及以来，多少人沉溺其中，难以自拔。我们有没有想过，自己消耗的不是时间，而是生命？

日复一日，年复一年，时间真是很快。一转眼，我出家时的老和尚们都走了，我也成了老和尚。尤其是这些年，大家应该对无常有了更深的感受。疫情前，虽然社会也在日新月异，但有相对的稳定性，容易给



人带来常见的假相，以为努力就能达成既定目标。但现在会发现，无常来势凶猛。从疫情的持续波动，到日益严重的国际冲突、自然灾害，到处充满着不确定性。不管当下是老年、中年还是青年，谁都不能保证，今生的余额还有多少。可能在几十年后，也可能就在明年，甚至明天。即使还有几十年，能够用于修行的时间还有多少？

每天的定课中，我们都在忆念人身的暇满、义大、难得，有没有把这样的认识落实到心行？有没有提醒自己，珍惜光阴，善用时间？我们的身口意三业，有

多少在正念中，多少在妄想中？有多少具有价值，多少只是虚度？

今天，整个环境都是和贪嗔痴相应的，特别需要对身口意三业作出断舍离，舍弃没价值的放逸行为，建立有意义、有规律的正念生活。从每天起床后，上午做什么，下午做什么，晚上做什么，要有明确的时间安排，精确到小时甚至分钟。有了指标，我们就知道什么时候该做什么，不该做什么。

从佛法角度看，时间只是根据物体运行设定的，本身是假相。但同时，它也可以是生命的计量方式，体现了我们对暇满人身的使用。有效规划时间，带着正念去生活、做事、修行，才能远离颠倒妄想，摆脱放逸串习，实现人身的最大价值。

## 5. 内在贪著

相对舍弃物品来说，舍弃贪著是最难的。其根源，在于对自我和世界的依赖。如果不能舍弃贪著，即使把所有物品清理掉，要不了多久，又会故态复萌，回

到原点。这就必须拥有清静自足的心，才能摆脱贪著。也就是说，拥有只是为了“物品本身的功用”，而不是为了“拥有的感觉”。

曾经有个流行词叫“某某控”，你贪著什么，就会受制于什么。一旦被控，就意味着生命需要依赖，不再自由。失去这些依赖时，我们还会失魂落魄，痛苦万状。为什么被控？为什么会有这些痛苦？并不是饥寒交迫，也不是生存受到影响，只是渴求而不得的失落。问题在于，这些渴求和被控是我们制造的。如果没有渴求，生命本是自由且自足的。

所以，断舍离的核心是放下对物品的依赖，进而放下对自我和世界的贪著。这就需要通过禅修，用正念照破依赖和贪著，看清这些念头只是心灵天空的影像，是掌控不了我们的。

## 6. 心灵垃圾

唯识宗告诉我们，修行是转依的过程。所谓依，是代表你现前的存在。我们问问自己：是正念的存在，慈悲的存在，智慧的存在，温良恭俭让的存在，还是贪婪、嗔恨、嫉妒、傲慢、焦躁、抑郁、无聊的存在？现在的人多半属于后者。为什么会这样？为什么我们的心总是充满垃圾？

因为每个起心动念不是发生后就结束的，还会在内心里留下痕迹，播下种子。如果不加选择，只是顺着串习行事，留下的一定是不良心行。因为凡夫生命是贪嗔痴的延续，会习惯性地贪，习惯性地嗔，习惯性地不知不觉。这就必须通过禅修培养觉知力，看清心中有些什么，当下又是什么心所在活动。只有看清了，才能加以抉择，发展正向心行，舍弃负面心行。

刚开始，觉知力是有限的，即使看到也没能力作出改变。因为串习是无始以来的积累，积重难返。这也就是很多人说的，“道理我知道，就是做不到”。但再难也要去做，否则，垃圾会日积月累，把人围困其中。



转依，是转变生命的存在，开发觉醒、解脱、慈悲大爱的良性潜质。这个过程需要舍凡夫心，发菩提心。所以断舍离不仅是消极的放弃，同时也在积极开显。生命本来具足无尽宝藏，只是被无明所覆，虽有若无。舍弃心灵垃圾，我们才有能力开发生命的美好。

所以从根本上说，断舍离是要舍弃贪嗔痴。

### 三、现代人为什么不容易 断舍离

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当我们放下依赖  
就能根据生活的实际所需作出选择  
当断则断，当舍则舍  
而不是被依赖和贪著左右  
在舍和舍不得之间来回纠结

听了断舍离的道理，多数人都会表示认同，但真要断的时候，又觉得没那么容易，所谓知易行难。为什么会这样？关于这个问题，我觉得有以下几方面原因。

## 1. 缺乏宗教信仰

宗教信仰和断舍离有什么关系？

首先，宗教信仰可以让我们确立终极目标。一旦找到根本所在，物质自然没什么吸引力了。比如有的宗教以升天为终极目标，会认为尘世一切都是虚幻、短暂的，不必贪恋。其实断舍离的核心不是扔东西，

而是对事物作出重要与否的排序。这样就知道舍什么，为什么舍。当多余物品占满空间时，我们很容易看到，却往往忽视了，多余的人际关系、心灵垃圾会消耗生命能量，让人身心疲惫，所以这种取舍对生命发展更为重要。从学佛来说，终极目标是觉醒和解脱，进而带领一切众生走向觉醒和解脱。凡是和这一目标不相应，甚至会产生障碍的，都要主动舍弃。

其次，宗教信仰可以让人长慈悲，开智慧，断除贪嗔痴串习。世间的智者也推崇爱和智慧，但唯有佛法才能把这两种品质开发到极致。佛法所说的慈悲，是无缘大慈，同体大悲，是彻底的无我，圆满的利他。而世人通常所说的爱，往往是有我的。即使某些宗教倡导的博爱，也有教徒和异教徒之分，不能包容一切。佛法所说的智慧，是了悟人生真相、解脱一切烦恼的大智慧。具备这样的智慧，就能看清“一切有为法，如梦幻泡影”，还有必要执著吗？这就为断舍离提供了重要的思想基础。

可能有人会说，中国有那么多佛教徒，西方人也有宗教信仰，他们对世间的贪著似乎和普通人差不多，

并未减少。为什么这样？原因在于信仰的深浅。某些所谓的信，其实是为世俗生活服务的。比如有人到寺院烧点香，拜下佛，供两个水果，目的是为了多赚钱，保平安，一切顺利。这不是真正的信仰，自然也达不到信仰所能起到的作用。

## 2. 忽视精神追求

精神追求这个词，大家并不陌生，但要进一步问“你有什么精神追求”时，很多人就语焉不详了。在我们的生活中，从电视到手机，从马路上到电梯间，到处是关于物质追求的广告，五光十色，夺人眼球。当六根被这些信息不断刺激并占据的同时，精神追求的空间就一再被挤压，被吞噬。

另一方面，人们也能看到物质是朝不保夕的，今天拥有，不等于明天拥有，更不等于永远拥有。这就加剧了不安全感。就像一个人落入海中，抱住什么在那里漂着，让他放下是很难的，因为他害怕放下就沉了。同样，当我们把依赖全部寄托于物质，只会想着

多多益善，哪里还肯断、肯舍、肯离？问题是，执著并不能保住什么，反而让我们在拥有时更紧张，失去时更痛苦。

怎么解决这个问题？古人推崇孔颜之乐，这种乐是不受物质左右的，即使在“一箪食，一瓢饮，在陋巷，人不堪其忧”的境况下，依然能不改其乐。在瞬息万变的今天，如果我们想要找到内心的安定和富足，同样要注重精神追求。这才是安身立命的所在，不会因外境变化而动摇，也不会因物质多少而损耗。有了底气，就能从容作出取舍，而不是盲目囤积，什么都要牢牢抓着。

### 3. 推崇物质至上

过去，人们向往的是道德、智慧，视德才兼备者为榜样。现在，人们羡慕的是财富、声色，以财富排行榜作为成功标准。普通民众虽然上不了排行榜，也热衷于攀比，比如事业有多大，房子有多贵，车子有多豪。在这样的价值体系中，我们会将物质赋予很多

象征功能，把物质和自我紧紧捆绑在一起，认为物质就代表着成败与否，价值高下。既然物质这么重要，当然就不能舍弃。这也是我们不容易断舍离的原因。

我在给企业家们讲课时，经常会讲到成功观。通常的成功观，是从事业、财富、地位来衡量，非常狭隘。因为这些并不是人生的全部，如果一个人事业很大却道德败坏，财富很多却为富不仁，地位很高却贪赃枉法，难道就代表成功吗？所以，我们要从人生而不仅仅是物质来看待成功。

儒家的成功观是立足于做人，从立德、立功、立言来衡量。立德是完善自我，以德感人；立功是建功立业，服务社会；立言是著书立说，教化民众。而佛教的成功观是立足于解脱，以自利利他、自觉觉他为圆满。树立这些目标，我们就不会对物质恋恋不舍了。

#### 4. 无力摆脱依赖

很多人想断舍离时，总觉得这也有用，那也有用，难以摆脱对物质的依赖。一方面是缺乏精神追求，推崇物质至上；一方面是缺少戒定慧的修行，对物质依赖成性，想舍也身不由己。前者属于观念偏差，后者则是心力不足。

所以我们不仅要看清物质真相，建立精神追求，知道什么才是最有价值的，还要增长定力。只有安住





正念，才能从客观的角度审视物品，以及由此产生的心念。一心想买或舍不得丢时，知道这些只是念头，不代表生命的真正需要。当我们放下依赖，就能根据生活的实际所需作出选择，当断则断，当舍则舍，而不是被依赖和贪著左右，在舍和舍不得之间来回纠结。

## 5. 没有布施之心

因为对物质的贪著和吝啬，有人赚了钱、买了东西之后，觉得这也好，那也好，哪怕自己用不完，放坏了，也舍不得给出去。还有人虽然不看重物质，但缺乏布施意识，没有和人分享的习惯。这些也是断舍离的障碍。

对治这些问题，就要认识布施的意义，培养利他的意乐。在六度四摄的菩萨行中，都以布施为先。六度是以布施为基础，然后修习持戒、忍辱、精进、禅定、般若；四摄也是以布施为前提，进而修习爱语、利行、同事。由此，可见布施的重要性。因为布施既可以破除悭贪，又可以培植福报，积累资粮，还可以

和众生广结善缘。此外，布施不仅有财布施，还包括法布施和无畏布施，是修习慈悲心的重要途径。

如果我们确立宗教信仰、建立精神追求、重塑价值观、由戒定慧增强心力、培养布施利他之心，就能从观念到实践，解决断舍离的障碍。

## 四、如何修习断舍离

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所有的匮乏都来自贪欲  
当你的贪欲越多，生命就越匮乏  
这是再多财富都改变不了的  
现在人整天忙于挖坑  
能力越大，挖的坑就越多  
挖了之后再填坑  
填坑的过程中，又在继续挖坑

作为佛弟子，我们怎么来修断舍离？和通常所说的断舍离有什么区别？我从五个方面和大家分享。

## 1. 树立正见

断舍离不是简单的整理和丢弃物品，必须立足于生活哲学和人生智慧来做，所以正见非常重要。凡夫处处以自我为轴心，执著我的身体、我的想法、我的情绪，进而执著我的家庭、我的事业、我的财产、我的人际关系。如果没有缘起的智慧，我们很容易把外在的种种视为“我”的一部分。

到底什么代表“我”的存在？身体能代表吗？想

法能代表吗？拥有的物品、关系能代表吗？其实，这些不过是条件关系的假相。为什么我们会习惯性地将此当作“我”？是因为无明，因为看不清“我”是什么，所以到处搜罗，用各种东西来充实它，给自我的感觉找到依托，似乎执著的东西越多，这个“我”就越强大。

学佛，就要用缘起的智慧审视，看清自己认定为“我”的这一切，都不能代表“我”的本质。否则，这些错误认定就会成为烦恼之根。比如父母把孩子当成自己的所属，对孩子横加干涉，结果使孩子很痛苦，自己也很痛苦。这种情况非常普遍，就是因为混淆边界，没想过孩子也是独立的个体，并不是“我”。有着血缘亲情的关系尚且不能代表“我”，何况是其他身外之物呢？

缘起的智慧让人看到，我们认定的我和我所都是无自性的，和我们只有暂时的关系，且时时处在无常变化中。如果视以为我，对此产生永恒的执著，痛苦就在所难免了。就像人们害怕容颜变老，害怕财富贬值，害怕事业失败，当这一切发生在别人身上时，我

们会觉得很正常，而发生在自己身上时，就难以接受了。为什么？因为这不再是普通的变老、贬值和失败，而是“我”受到了伤害。

断舍离也是如此。如果只是对断舍离的对象作出客观判断，其实并不难。难就难在，这一切和“我”产生关系后，执著随之出动。而且这种执著是有粘性的，充满主观设定，结果就剪不断理还乱了。所以我们要树立正见，学会从缘起的角度看世界，看人生，看待生活中的一切，就能奉行中道，取舍有度。

## 2. 调整价值观

价值观似乎是一个哲学问题，和现实没什么关系。其实，我们每天的生活都隐含着价值观的影响。比如要什么不要什么，做什么不做什么，这些取舍不是偶然的，而是由价值观决定的。我们觉得什么重要，什么对自己有利，才想要得到，才会去行动。如果价值观有问题，我们所做的一切也会产生偏差。

近几十年来，随着西方文化的冲击，传统价值观

有了极大改变，唯利是图，拜金成风，带来一系列社会问题。而从世界范围看，人们都在忙着赚钱、消费、破坏环境，使得地球几十亿年形成的资源，在短短200年内急剧消耗，千疮百孔。过去，我曾多次讲过环保主题，如《生命的回归》《佛教的环保思想》等。其中说到的问题非但没有改善，还愈演愈烈。从海洋的污染、南北极的气温升高，到极端气候的频繁出现，灾难已经离我们越来越近。此刻，数百年不遇的极限高温正发生在很多人身边。可以说，人类到了必须反省的时候。否则，我们见证的历史，就是无法回头的毁灭史。

怎么改变这种趋势，改变物质主义的导向？必须依东方智慧重塑价值观。儒家倡导“仁义礼智信，温良恭俭让”，是基本的做人准则。进一步，是“立德、立功、立言”的三不朽人生，要做有道德的人，对社会大众有用的人，而不是精致的利己主义者。从佛法来说，是以觉醒、解脱作为终极目标。当我们确立这样的价值观，依儒释道文化修身做人，才能重塑世界秩序，改变不断崩坏的现状。



东西方文化的不同主要有两点。其一，在世界和人的关系上，西方文化立足于改变世界，认为发展科技、创造财富就能带来幸福。东方文化立足于改变自身，比如儒家以修身为本，进而齐家、治国、平天下，是从做人到服务社会；佛教说“心净则国土净”，也是从改变自心到改变世界。怎么做人？离不开心性理论。我曾和岳麓书院朱汉民院长探讨“如何立心立命”，认为儒家和佛教的共同点，是由认识并调整心性，进一步造福世界，是由内而外的。

其二，是有我和无我。西方人文主义思潮倡导个



性解放，尊重个体的价值实现。相对中世纪的封建思想，确实是一种进步。但在解放过程中，如果不能认清“我”的真相，就会陷入我执，使人性的各个方面被张扬。所以这种思潮在带来文艺复兴、科技发展的同时，也导致严重的社会问题和环境危机。而佛法正见是建立在无我的基础上，因为无我，才能真正做到众生平等、依正不二，不会为了满足欲望去伤害众生，破坏自然。

### 3. 修习戒定慧

除了改变观念，断舍离还离不开修行实践，那就是戒定慧。

首先是戒，帮助我们过一种简单、清净、有规律、有节制的生活。现代社会物质丰富，鼓励消费，人很容易迷失其中，把生活搞得复杂，也使心随之混乱。在这样的环境中，特别需要建立行为规范。大家生活在别院，有清净的氛围，规律的作息，依健康生活五大信念自处，依六和精神共住，互相支持，成为彼此

的增上缘。

佛法强调自依止和法依止，就是要靠自己，靠制度。佛陀入灭前告诫弟子：“汝等比丘，于我灭后当尊重珍敬波罗提木叉，如暗遇明，贫人得宝。当知此则是汝大师，若我住世无异此也。”也就是说，要以戒为师，依制度而不是某个领袖生活。当然，这和亲近善知识并不冲突。在修行上，需要依善知识引导；但在生活和团体共处中，则要依法治而不是人治。这个法就是戒律。其中最基础的居士五戒，就是我们每天念诵的“健康生活五大信念”，要不杀、不盗、不邪淫、不妄语、不饮酒。依此生活，本身就是最好的断舍离。出家戒更为严格，如比丘有 250 条戒，比丘尼有 348 条戒，包含对衣食住行的种种规范。不仅把可拥有的物品降到最低限度，还包含行为上的断舍离，告诉弟子什么能做什么不能做。

其次是定，是对心念的断舍离。现在是一个浮躁的时代，人们往往掉举、散乱，在念头的海洋中随波逐流。定是让我们通过修习止观，把正念带到每个当下。走路，只是专心地走路；吃饭，只是专心地吃

饭；做事，只是专心地做事；静坐，只是专注于所缘。当我们选择一个锚点时，心中只有这一件事，其他念头都暂时切断。有些人觉得，同时做几件事才有效率。其实，这种方式是在增长散乱。时间长了，就会失去专注力，心也不堪重负。就像电脑同时开了很多窗口后，CPU就会不够用，造成卡顿或直接宕机。

第三是慧，是看清真相的能力。如果说戒是对物品和行为的断舍离，定是对心念的断舍离，那么慧才能真正斩断贪嗔痴的根源。因为戒和定只是作出选择，贪嗔痴只是暂时蛰伏起来，并没有彻底消除，甚至会一次次地伺机而动。慧的修行，是由训练觉知开发心的明性，就能和念头保持距离，在念头出现时立刻认出它，进而通过观照来解决它。这是通往觉醒的关键所在。

有了戒定慧，才是究竟意义上的断舍离。

#### 4. 声闻与断舍离

这里所说的声闻行者，主要指出家人。出家是印度各宗教的传统，并非佛教特有的。在有着 3000 多年历史的婆罗门教中，教徒一生分为梵行期、家居期、林栖期、遁世期四个阶段。他们在完成世俗责任后，就要离开家庭，到山林修习禅定和苦行。中国早期并没有出家人，但有隐士。他们同样舍弃了名利，过着离群索居的出世生活。孔子游说诸侯途中，不时会被路遇的隐士嘲笑一番。在他们看来，这种行为不免过于入世，非智者所为。

出家，本身是断舍离的体现。用通俗的话说，即看破红尘。但前提是认识到轮回本质是痛苦的，而不是遭遇挫折后的逃避。佛教所说的出离心，正是看清生命真相后的主动选择。佛陀的出家，就是这样一种伟大的放弃。他不仅放弃了世间的家庭、财富，还放弃了世人求之不得的王位。在榜样的激励下，不少王公贵族先后出家。如我们熟悉的寂天菩萨、阿底峡尊者等，都曾贵为王子，却选择了一无所有的修行生活。

在原始僧团中，出家人以乞食为生，有些南传寺院至今保留了这一传统。之所以这么做，是让生活单纯到极致，连生计都不必考虑，更没有财产要管理，全身心地内修外弘，一方面精进自修，一方面在社会教化说法。按照戒律，出家人只能拥有最基本的生活用品，如比丘六物、百一物等。如果多了，要作相应的说净手续，把这部分物品舍出去。此外，人际关系也极其单纯。僧众依法共住，所有事务都有相应的羯磨，即办事规则。不论4人共住，还是400人、4000人，都是依照这套模式，僧事僧办。而不是像现代社会那样，虽有无数套管理方式，依然问题重重。

佛教传入中国后，因为国人对乞食的歧视，并没有沿用这种资生方式，而是在祖师倡导下，形成“一日不作，一日不食”的传统。但生活依然保持了简朴的原则，布衣蔬食，身无长物。

总之，出家就是彻底的断舍离。不论身处何时何地，生活细节有什么变化，这种精神内核是一以贯之的，否则就会出一家而入一家，违背出家的初衷。相形之下，现在出家人面对的事务和应酬过多，如果缺

乏定力，没有理想的管理制度，很容易干扰修行。所以我们要遵循佛陀教导，以戒为师，通过简单的生活减少贪著，内修外弘。

## 5. 禅者与断舍离

关于禅者的生活，《指月录》《景德传灯录》等典籍中有很多记载。他们食松花，衣荷叶，居茅屋，过着常人难以想象的清贫生活，依然乐在其中。为什么能这样？因为禅者看到，觉性才是生命的无尽宝藏，整个宇宙的价值都无法与之相比。佛菩萨正是宝藏的开发者，所以能尽未来际地利益众生。沿着他们指引的道路，同样可以证佛所证。看到这一点，还会在乎世间的名利和享乐吗？

很多寺院会有“莫向外求”的匾额，提醒我们，真正的宝藏就在自心，无须向外攀缘。而且它是人人具备的，在圣不增，在凡不减。这种具备并不是说法，是可以通过修行体认的。过去的禅林大德修行有成后，生死自在，荣辱不惊，即使一无所有，也不觉得缺少

什么。反观现在的人，即使有了上亿甚至百亿，有了几辈子都花不完的钱，依然不觉得富有。因为他们内心还有更大的欲望，还想得到更多。

所有的匮乏都来自贪欲。当你的贪欲越多，生命就越匮乏，这是再多财富都改变不了的。我常说，现在人整天忙于挖坑，能力越大，挖的坑就越多。挖了之后再填坑，填坑的过程中，又在继续挖坑。为了填五个坑，再挖十个坑；为了填十个坑，再挖二十个坑。比如有人经营企业，本来只是一个小坑，成功后已经把坑填上。但他还想扩大经营，于是去银行贷款，坑就挖大了。再次成功后，继续贷款，坑也随之增大。当坑无限扩张，一旦有了问题，往往就超出自己的填坑能力。现实中的不少企业，正是在急速扩张的过程中，贷款越来越多，最后资金链一断就塌方了。

对外在的需求越多，内心的坑就越大。而坑是代表匮乏，当我们越来越匮乏，就会越来越贫穷。而禅者是直接开发内心的富足，体认到这一点，不论面对什么样的物质生活，都能自足、寂静、欢喜。外在的生死、荣辱、得失，没什么能困扰到他。

佛陀成道后，不少王族青年开始追随他。有位王子出家后，精进修行，法喜充满，常常情不自禁地高喊：欢喜啊，真是欢喜！大家问他怎么了，他说：以前我在宫中锦衣玉食，被那么多人精心伺候，严密保护，只觉得很累很无聊。现在一无所有，却什么都不用担心，还从修行中体会到源源不断的欢喜。

什么叫富有？就是当你一无所有，也不觉得缺少任何东西。禅者正是过着这样的生活。他们在水边林下坐卧经行，静坐观心，因为没有束缚而自在，因为自在而欢喜。这种内心富足是任何物质无法带来的，还有什么会舍不得？



## 五、断舍离的意义

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身体需要新陈代谢才能保持健康  
生活同样离不开这种代谢  
放下依赖和贪著  
我们才能放下心灵的重负  
所以断舍离也是一个法门  
是和修行及禅意生活相应的

断舍离的意义是什么？换言之，修习断舍离可以为我们带来什么样的生活？关于这个问题，我想到九个方面。

## 1. 自然的生活

断舍离可以使我们远离物欲，回归自然。中国本来是农业社会，人们的生活和土地息息相关。但现代社会重商轻农，城市向农村急速扩张，也使我们和自然渐行渐远。有人说，这是最好的时代，也是最糟的时代。从电话、电脑到飞机、高铁，我们享受着前所未有的便利。其代价，却是对资源的过度消耗，对自

然的大肆破坏。当这些消耗和破坏已不可逆转时，人们才发现，原来青山绿水才是最好的金山银山，是可持续发展的资本，也是滋养身心的源泉。在国外，已有医院把“去森林公园”作为治疗某些疾病的处方。

自然是具有治愈力的。过去的孩子没什么玩具，都是在天地间嬉戏玩耍，朝气蓬勃。但现在的孩子从小就玩游戏，刷手机，成人同样沉溺于电子产品。短短十几年来，近视、颈椎病变等显性问题迅速增长，但更大的隐患，是由此造成的心理问题。如果不加改变，我们会像缺乏光照的植物那样，逐渐失去活力。

所以我们要摆脱物质的捆绑，走向自然。“春有百花秋有月，夏有凉风冬有雪，若无闲事挂心头，便是人间好时节。”当心不再塞满东西时，才能感受自然的美好，从中得到滋养，得到平静。

## 2. 朴素的生活

断舍离可以使我们建立朴素的生活。现在整个社会都在鼓动消费，经济不断增长，我们的欲望也在

不断增长。2000多年前，佛陀就告诫我们：“知足之法，即是富乐安隐之处。知足之人，虽卧地上犹为安乐；不知足者，虽处天堂亦不称意。不知足者，虽富而贫；知足之人，虽贫而富。”庄子同样感慨：“今世俗之君子，多危身弃生以殉物，岂不悲哉！”可见，少欲才是幸福的关键所在。欲望越少，就越容易满足，越容易幸福，所谓知足常乐。

为什么现代人不容易知足？以前的人视野很小，所见不过是吾乡吾土，没什么比较。但我们现在能看到世界各地的生活，看到超级富豪的奢侈享乐，各种成功学又在给人灌输“你也可以”的信号，这就使得欲望被无尽扩张。如果说，古人的知足有环境因素，那么在今天，我们特别需要提高定力，主动约束。因为欲望越多，就越不容易满足，幸福的成本也会越高。一旦失去，还会带来不必要的痛苦。

断舍离所做的，是从以物为中心，回归以人为中心。怎么理解以人为中心？很多人觉得，即使拥有再多东西，还是以我为中心——因为我需要这些东西，拥有了很高兴。他没想到，自己是被诱惑所刺激，被

欲望所捆绑，才会控制不住地购物。当一阵冲动过去，就后悔得想要剁手明志了。

以人为中心，是立足于人的自身来思考：我要建立什么生活？什么是我真正需要、有用且健康的？我们全面审视后会发现，生活确实不需要这么多东西。当心不被物欲控制时，就会有更多时间投入精神追求，发展兴趣爱好。

### 3. 悠闲的生活

断舍离可以使我们摆脱忙碌，建立悠闲的生活。现代人最大的特点就是忙，忙着赚钱，忙着消费，忙着破坏环境。钱多了又担心贬值，还要投入大量时间理财，真是为物所役，为物所累。

因为欲望，人们在占有、攀比、竞争中不断循环。首先是占有，总想拥有更多东西，从衣食、手机到汽车、房子，多多益善，永无止境。其次是攀比，有了还不满足，还想胜人一筹。社会上有不同的圈子，当你好不容易在原有圈子爬到顶层，进入另一个圈子，

又是第一层，还得从头来过。最后努力爬到顶层，再进入新的圈子，继续周而复始地努力一遍。攀比又导致竞争，带来自我的重要感、优越感、主宰欲。我们以为这三种感觉代表了“我”，其实，这只是心灵世界的健康因素。当你被它控制，才会成为奴隶，不停地为它打工。

常常是，我们拥有得越多，追求得反而更多，结果就更忙碌。只有摆脱欲望，不再有那么多需求，生活才会因为简单而从容，心灵才会因为从容而自由。



## 4. 有序的生活

断舍离可以使我们摆脱无序和混乱，建立有序的生活。世上真正能按理想生活，对自己感到满意的人其实不多，很多人对自己的行为和生活并不满意，却受制于串习、惰性、不良嗜好，无力改变。

相对生活习惯，整理物品是比较简单且容易入手的。我们可以将此作为改变串习的开始，通过断舍离，使环境变得整洁有序。进一步，对饮食、行为、作息等方面作出调整。然后通过 21 天或 1 个月、2 个月的巩固，逐步形成新的习惯，做到饮食有节，行为有度，作息规律。如果个人的力量不足，可以寻求环境支持。别院就营造了清静如法的氛围，通过种种规范和集体力量，帮助大家建立有序的生活。这不是谁需要你这么做，而是你想让自己变得更好。

## 5. 品质的生活

断舍离可以使我们建立有品质、有意义的生活。我们问问自己：现在的生活到底有没有品质？有没有

意义？每天做的、说的、想的，哪些对成长有正向价值，可以让生命得到提升，哪些只是在消磨时光，甚至在内心制造垃圾？事实上，多数人的存在就是一大堆混乱情绪，加上一大堆错误想法，每天都在造垃圾和扔垃圾。

生命是无尽的累积，其品质就取决于我们的存在。我们买东西时，会选择自己能力范围内的最高品质，却往往不在意，自己是什么样的生命产品。如果认识到，生命品质才是永远伴随我们的根本，是决定幸福的关键，我想，没人不想成为优质产品。

如何提升品质？儒家讲“学以成人”，人不是吃饭就能成长的，那只是身体的自然属性，和动物没有区别。人所以为万物之灵，取决于智慧和道德，这是需要通过学习成就的。佛法则是由断恶修善，造就高尚的生命品质。体现在身口意三业，首先是通过断舍离来减弱贪嗔痴，然后由勤修戒定慧，彻底断除烦恼，圆满智慧和慈悲。当我们的心行有品质、有价值，生命才会变得有品质、有价值。



## 6. 清净的生活

断舍离可以使我们改变混乱的现状，建立清净的生活。在今天这个物质过剩的时代，人们被海量的物品包围着，从环境到生活方式都混乱不堪。这种混乱又导致心念的混乱，互相干扰，乱上加乱。如何改变这种状况？

首先要通过断舍离改变环境，在清净的空间，更容易看清心行是否混乱。我们应该有这样的经验，在乱七八糟的环境中，言行往往变得肆无忌惮，任意妄为。而在清净的环境中，就会自觉地有所收敛，内心也更容易安定，可以有效规范身口意三业。进一步，还要通过修行清理无明、散乱及贪嗔痴串习，照见“本来无一物”的清净心。这才是究竟的清净，在任何环境中都能灵光独耀，不染尘埃。

## 7. 环保的生活

断舍离可以使我们改变消费习惯，从物质至上转为低碳环保的生活。环境的持续恶化，和高消费有着密切关系。有句话叫作“没有买卖就没有伤害”，说的是杀生问题，同样适用于对环境的破坏。如果不是欲望的极度膨胀，人们根本不需要那么多物品，也就不需要耗费那么多资源，更不会制造那么多垃圾。正是不良的消费习惯，把大量资源变成了商品，并且很快地，又变成地球无法负担的垃圾。

全世界究竟有多少商品，恐怕没人可以给出答案，因为每天不断有新品问世。其中，还有大量一次性商品和快消品。它们的廉价和方便，使普通人都能承担且乐于购买。但承担这种消费的仅仅是钱吗？它的背后，是越来越枯竭的资源，越来越脆弱的生态。所以我们要奉行低碳环保的生活，在减少欲望的同时，敬畏自然，爱护环境。

## 8. 利他的生活

断舍离可以使我们弱化我执，从利己转向利他的生活。虽然佛教强调自利利他，但这个自利，是指有益成长的正向利益。如果是自私自利，非但不能自利，还是一切衰损之门。当人们拥有无数物品，并沉溺于这种拥有，就会增长我法二执，强化自我的三种感觉，似乎一切都是为“我”服务的。事实上，是把自己束缚其中，看不到人生还有什么更大的意义。

通过断舍离，舍弃不必要的物品和人际关系，将会打开全新的世界。当我们不再为物所役，就有更多的时间用于精神追求，成为有生命品质的人；当我们不再为物所累，就有更多的精力和资源服务社会，利益大众，成为有爱心和慈悲心的人。这种成长和由此带来的快乐，是物质无法比拟的。



## 9. 觉醒的生活

断舍离可以使我们放下贪著，开启觉醒、解脱的生活。断舍离的离，是舍离对物质的依赖和执著，这也是断舍离的核心所在。否则的话，“断舍离”可能只是重新采购的借口。确实有人在断舍离之后买得更多，然后再断再买，所谓旧的不去新的不来。这就违背断舍离的本意了。

所以关键是摆脱依赖和贪著，以及由此形成的贪

嗔痴串习。这是一切烦恼的根源，也是生死轮回的根源。解脱，就是要解除这种捆绑。在这个层面，断舍离是我们走向觉醒、成就解脱的助缘。即使暂时达不到这样的高度，能在生活中减少对物质的依赖，当下就能体会减少依赖带来的轻松和自由，这是每个人都可以感受的。

我们知道，身体需要新陈代谢才能保持健康，生活同样离不开这种代谢。放下依赖和贪著，我们才能放下心灵的重负。所以断舍离也是一个法门，是和修行及禅意生活相应的。希望大家认真学习、思考，并落实到行动中。于个人，可以改善生活；于世界，可以保护环境；于现前，可以调身修心；于究竟，可以走向解脱。





DISCUSSING  
“DECLUTTERING” FROM A  
BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Master Jiqun

Translated by MPI Translation Center

Lectured at the Great Awakening Hall,  
Amrita Retreat Center, August 2022

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Our lifestyle aesthetics program has launched the “Decluttering (*Danshari*)” project, which is very meaningful. This concept of decluttering has gained popularity over the years. Many have heard of it, and some have practiced it to some extent. To advance this program, I communicated with the project team and researched relevant information online, discovering that the principles of decluttering actually align well with Chan-inspired spaces and the slow-paced lifestyle we advocate.

The characteristics of a Chan-inspired space are not just about adopting a certain style but also embodying a corresponding life-style and even an attitude towards life. The concept of “emptiness” serves here as both a guiding principle and characteristic in the design of these spaces. In our retreat center, from the selection of materials to the arrangement of objects and the choice of color schemes, every element follows the principles of simplicity. Being in such an environment naturally calms the mind. At the same time, Chan spaces demand a lot from their users. Without proper cultivation, good use and maintenance, even the finest space can deteriorate and eventually become as cluttered as a storeroom. This requires maintaining a simplistic and orderly lifestyle to complement and nourish the Chan space. Simplicity here means having fewer things; otherwise, it will not achieve a sense of ethereality; orderliness involves maintaining a disciplined routine, keeping things tidy, and putting everything back in its place after use. These principles are at the heart of decluttering and are the foundation for cultivating a Chan lifestyle. The latter’s strength lies in providing us with

operational guidelines and practical experience.

Furthermore, we must recognize the profound level of practice embodied in decluttering. The essence of decluttering is “letting go,” which is also an ongoing process of relinquishing attachments in spiritual practice. As the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* suggests, “Total abandonment leads to freedom from suffering, and my mind attains nirvana.” Attachments are essentially categorized into self-attachments and world-attachments, also known as ego-attachment and attachment to phenomena (dharmas). Only when we have no attachment to ourselves or the world can we achieve liberation and move towards enlightenment. Practicing decluttering with this insight is a method that corresponds with the pursuit of liberation.

Thus, decluttering not only enhances our quality of life but also enriches our spiritual growth, purifying both mind and body. It is an effective combination of worldly practices and Buddhist teachings.

# I

## WHAT IS DECLUTTERING

### 1. The Origin of Decluttering

The concept of decluttering was introduced by the Japanese clutter management consultant Hideko Yamashita in 2000. She held lectures in various places with growing influence, and in 2009, she published a book titled *Danshari*. After its introduction to China in 2013, the book generated a significant buzz, with millions of copies sold.

Why has decluttering resonated so deeply with many? It addresses common issues faced by modern people and

offers a range of solutions. We live in a time of material abundance, owning clothes and items, possibly hundreds or thousands of times more than our ancestors. Many find their homes cluttered with belongings, yet struggling to find what they need, significantly impacting their quality of life. This has led to the emergence of professional organizers who assist in decluttering and organizing spaces. However, without a fundamental change in lifestyle, such an organization proves unsustainable in the long run in the face of continuous excessive purchasing.

During her university years, Hideko Yamashita studied yoga and was influenced by Indian yoga philosophy. Inspired by the principles of “cutting off, letting go and detachment,” she developed the concept of “Dan-Sha-Ri.” While decluttering is often perceived as managing physical possessions, it also extends to our lifestyle, our outlook on life, values, and worldview. Only by adjusting our lives according to the principles of “cutting off, letting go and detachment” and making appropriate choices, we ensure that our possessions serve us, rather than ending up surrounded

by a vast amount of items without even realizing it.

## **2. The Implications of Decluttering (Danshari)**

Decluttering is grounded in a threefold philosophy. The first principle “Dan,” involves cutting out unnecessary items from our lives. This involves not purchasing or acquiring things we don’t need. Therefore, we need a clear understanding of what is truly essential. Looking around us, our lives are probably surrounded by superfluous things. The second principle “Sha,” focuses on letting go of excessive and useless belongings. The third, “Ri,” encourages us to detach ourselves from attachment of material possessions and even desires.

These principles are progressive: “Dan” aims to prevent new problems from arising, “Sha” addresses and resolves existing problems, and “Ri” seeks to eliminate the fundamental causes of the problems.

Decluttering originates from Indian cultural traditions.



India has many religions, and despite their diverse beliefs, they commonly center on samsara and liberation. They believe that samsara is suffering and that humans fall into it due to the shackles of desire. Only by severing desires can one escape samsara and achieve liberation. Based on this, these religions emphasize asceticism and austerity, hoping that enduring physical hardships can help overcome desires and attain liberation. It is noted that even today, over five million people are practicing such extreme forms of asceticism, including holding an arm in the air for decades or adopting vows to live like certain animals, such as cows, dogs or pigs. Asceticism isn't unique to India; there are other religions worldwide, to varying degrees, advocate it as a means to control desires. So, how does Buddhism view this issue?

Buddha initially subjected himself to severe austerities but concluded that such practices were not the ultimate path to enlightenment. Instead, he proposed the Middle Way, which on one hand, involves being content with minimal belongings and discarding the relentless pursuit

to fulfill desires. On the other hand, it means avoiding meaningless asceticism that serves no purpose other than to inflict suffering. Buddha recognized the value of certain austerities that contribute to liberation. For example, the Four Reliances and Dhutanga practice might appear to be austere, but they are intended to cut through greed and facilitate one's spiritual practice.

Following this, Buddha established various precepts tailored to the capacities of different beings, such as the Individual Liberation Precepts and the Bodhisattva Precepts. These precepts aim to foster a pure mental environment conducive to spiritual practice by regulating one's behavior and lifestyle, thus setting the foundation for deeper concentration and wisdom.

These precepts illustrate what “should be done” and what “should not be done.” Similarly, decluttering embodies this precept-like nature, guiding us on what “should be discarded” and what “should be kept.” We declutter to reflect on our internal choices, using this process as a chance

to untangle our lives. This reflection directly influences how we live, how we perceive the world, and how we shape our future. Thus, decluttering can be both straightforward and profound, serving not only as a method for organizing but also as a philosophy for living and a form of life wisdom. Furthermore, under the guidance of the Right View of Buddhism, it can also align with the path towards liberation.

## II

### THE SUBJECTS OF DECLUTTERING

Decluttering challenges us to consider: what exactly does it mean to discard? Typically, we think of throwing away or giving away excess belongings. Yet, this is just the starting point. The philosophy embedded in these three syllables of Danshari invites us to examine all aspects of life, particularly focusing on six key areas:

#### **1. Household Goods**

Under the influence of Western lifestyles, the entire world is engaged in uncontrolled resource exploitation and increasing production capacity. Some manufacturers

demand to double their output year over year—if they generate 10 billion this year, they target 20 billion the next year. To meet these targets, billions of garments must be sold annually, leading to a relentless push to drive consumer spending. In the past, manufacturers produced clothing because people needed them. Nowadays, to sell more, the manufacturers produce them to make you feel that you still need more clothing. How is this demand created? Through a mix of influencer marketing, promotional hype, fashion trends, and precise targeting based on big data... There’s always a method to keep you purchasing endlessly. Our homes thus overflow with countless garments and footwear. As a result, some items are discarded with the price tags still on them.

How much clothing do we actually require, considering the actual functionality of it? How many outfits and pairs of shoes does one need throughout the four seasons? There’s a common misconception that spending one’s own money on purchases is entirely justifiable. Yet, this overlooks the fact that excessive consumption depletes the

Earth's resources and diminishes our collective blessings. Our resources are limited, and so are our blessings. In fact, this type of consumption has led to severe ecological crises, which are not only natural disasters but also man-made catastrophes.

Therefore, we must change our perception of consumption. Before making a purchase, consider whether it's something we truly need. Too often, we buy impulsively and later realize the item wasn't as desired or appealing as initially thought. Sometimes, we even cannot remember why it was purchased. This step is vital—purchasing only what is necessary and using things to their fullest potential is an effective use of resources. This also prevents unnecessary burdens in our lives.

Regarding the problems already created, we must learn to select, organize, and discard, retaining only what is genuinely useful. The forthcoming sessions will introduce practical methods, including item categorization, choosing what you need, and the correct attitude toward

belongings. Ultimately, our possessions should enhance our lives, offering ease rather than inconvenience.

## **2. Nourishing Diet**

Diet is essential for survival but can also cause diseases; the old wisdom says, “Illness enters through the mouth.” Current studies validate that a poor diet can trigger many health problems. Data reveals that the number of people in China with various chronic diseases is increasing, with healthcare expenses predicted to hit an astounding eight trillion Yuan in the next five years. That is a staggering figure! Among the factors that affect health, including disordered lifestyles, excessive stress, and negative mind-sets, the impact of reckless eating also cannot be ignored.

It is necessary to apply the principles of decluttering to our eating habits, which means identifying healthy foods and unhealthy foods to be avoided. For instance, meat consumption involves not only the ethical implications of killing but also reveals the numerous issues in the

livestock-raising process. Traditionally, livestock were raised naturally, but their growth periods have been dramatically reduced to maximize profits quickly. Hormones are used to speed up growth, and antibiotics are administered to prevent diseases. Within just a few months, these animals, nourished on synthetic feed and medications, make their way to our dining tables. It is hard to imagine the amount of toxins and hidden risks accumulated in such meat. By contrast, although vegetables also involve chemicals like fertilizers and pesticides, they can be washed, and there are options like organic or eco-friendly vegetables, which are generally safer.

There are three key aspects to consider when applying decluttering to our diets:

First, choose healthy foods. Remember, what we eat fills our stomachs and becomes part of our body's metabolism. It is not like putting something in the drawer. Once consumed, it's not easy to discard. Given that some businesses might illegally add harmful substances for profit,



we must make choices carefully. Also, understanding related knowledge is essential: first, select foods that suit your body type; second, learn healthy cooking techniques to minimize using too much oil, salt, and sugar; and third, learn to read and understand food labels to reduce or eliminate consumption of heavily processed foods with too many additives. Moderation is also crucial; even the healthiest foods can backfire once over-consumed.

Second, eat at the appropriate times. The ancient saying “Do not eat out of season” refers to both the timing of meals and the seasonality of foods. From a health perspective, breakfast should be hearty, lunch should be filling, and dinner should be light or even skipped. Buddhism advocates not eating after noon. Even if dinner is necessary, eating should be like taking medicine, only to alleviate hunger without indulging in taste. However, modern people often go against this wisdom with hurried or skipped breakfasts, quick lunches at work, and overly indulgent dinners, sometimes even followed by late-night snacks. Such habits can disrupt digestion, sleep, and

immunity over time, leading to various health issues or a sub-health state. Moreover, choosing naturally ripened, seasonal produce over off-season items is best.

Third, keep a mindful distance from food. Monastic regulations suggest that areas for eating and storing food should be clearly defined and separated from other spaces. Eating should be confined to these designated areas but not other places. This is an effective measure to avoid the unconscious consumption of snacks, especially today when most snacks are filled with numerous additives that foster cravings and compromise health.

By following these guidelines, one can establish healthy dietary habits. Ensuring that food is consumed appropriately and at suitable times is vital because eating is one of the two primary desires in human nature, and a lack of vigilance can easily lead to unhealthy habits.

### 3. Interpersonal Relationships

Upon entering society, one is inevitably involved in various interpersonal relationships, keeping us occupied with social engagements and various activities. But do these interactions genuinely benefit our lives, work, and personal growth? Or are they merely a result of boredom or an inability to say no, leading us to engage in socializing for its own sake? How can we critically assess these relationships?

The ancient adage “one takes on the habits of one’s company” highlights the significant impact of our social circles on personal development. Buddhist scriptures also advise us to seek out good teachers and virtuous friends, as they are beneficial for our growth. For instance, the *Yogacarabhumi-Sastra* prioritizes “associating with good teachers” as the foremost of the Four Dharma Practices, and the *Dirgha Agama* places “befriending virtuous companions” at the beginning of the Three Means of Accomplishment, underscoring their importance in enhancing

spiritual cultivation. On the contrary, keeping the company of frivolous friends often leads to indulgence in mere pleasure-seeking, excessive laxity, and even vices like gambling and drug abuse, which can lead one down the path of crime.

It is necessary to make choices, especially at young ages when one is particularly susceptible to environmental influences. We should aspire to emulate the qualities of our virtuous friends with an open mind, while maintaining a distance from mischievous people, using them as cautionary examples. For neutral parties, we should interact moderately without seeking or avoiding them. Moreover, some emotional entanglements not only cause personal suffering but also bring trouble to others. These should be analyzed rationally, and decisive actions should be taken to break free rather than languishing in them.

As practitioners of Buddhism, once we attain a certain level of stability in our practice, we should reconsider our relationships from an altruistic perspective. It is

important to consider how it helps us and how we can benefit others. We should aspire to extend our compassion to all beings, treating them equally regardless of whether they are good or evil. However, in practice, we should focus on those with whom we share a karmic connection, meaning those we can truly benefit. Attempting to help everyone indiscriminately can be ineffective and even lead to unintended consequences and a waste of energy. Thus, compassion must be accompanied by wisdom. We must find a balance between universal benevolence and strategic discernment to give full play to our altruistic actions. It's like assessing the soil before sowing seeds. We need to determine which fields are ready to take the seeds, which need further cultivation, and which must be temporarily set aside. Without discernment, our efforts may yield no fruits, no matter how well-intentioned.

In summary, interpersonal relationships should be evaluated from both self-beneficial and altruistic perspectives, with different criteria based on different contexts.

#### **4. Conducts and Behaviors**

It's essential to look closer at our daily lives and question ourselves: How do we allocate our time from morning to night? What activities do we engage in? Which of these activities holds value? Which are truly necessary? Our time could slip away unnoticed without proper scrutiny. For example, a casual conversation can take up to half an hour, daydreaming can consume an hour, and before we know it, scrolling through social media, browsing online shops, and watching short videos can devour several more hours. In fact, this has become the norm for many. Especially with the widespread use of smartphones, many people lose themselves in these digital distractions. Have we ever considered that what we consume is not just time but life itself?

Days turn into years swiftly. In the blink of an eye, the elderly monks from my early days in the monastery passed away, and now I am among the elders. Especially in recent years, we have noticed the impermanence of life

in a deeper sense. Before the pandemic, relative stability often gave us the illusion of permanence despite the rapid changes in society. People believed that working hard could help them achieve their goals. But now, the fierce nature of impermanence is undeniable. From the ongoing fluctuations of the pandemic to escalating international conflicts and to natural disasters, we see that uncertainty is everywhere. Whether we are in our old age, middle age, or youth, no one can guarantee how much time we have left in this life. It could be decades, one year, or even one day. And even if we have decades left, how much of that time can truly be devoted to spiritual practice?

In our daily practices, we reflect on human life’s preciousness, significance, and rarity. But have we truly integrated this understanding into our actions and thoughts? Do we remind ourselves to cherish time and use it wisely? To what extent are our body, speech, and thoughts done with mindfulness, and to what extent are filled with delusion? How much of what we do is valuable and how much is just wasting time?

Today, we live in an environment that often caters to greed, aversion, and ignorance. We must apply the principles of decluttering to our actions, speech, and thoughts, discard worthless indulgences, and establish a meaningful, disciplined, and mindful way of living. From the moment we wake up, we should have a clear morning, afternoon, and evening schedule down to the hour or even minute. With clear benchmarks, we know what we should be doing at any given time and what we should avoid.

From a Buddhist perspective, time is merely a conventional concept based on the movement of objects and is inherently illusory. Yet, it also serves as a metric for life, reflecting our utilization of the precious human existence. By effectively planning our time—living, working, and practicing with mindfulness—we can steer clear of misguided fantasies, break free from indulgent habits, and realize the greatest potential of our lives.



## 5. Inner Attachments

Letting go of our inner attachments is arguably more challenging than letting go of physical possessions. The difficulty lies in our reliance on the self and the external world. Clearing out all our belongings without overcoming inner attachments only offers a temporary solution. It won't be long before we revert to our old ways and end up where we started. Freedom from these attachments requires cultivating a pure and self-sufficient mind, focusing on the functional use of objects rather than the sensation of possession.

There was once a popular term, “X-fanatic,” where ‘X’ stands for whatever you are attached to. Whatever controls you, dictates your life, stripping away your freedom. When these crutches are gone, we often feel lost and deeply distressed. But why do we become obsessed with something? Why do we experience distress when the object of the obsession is gone? It's not due to dire need or survival threats but rather the disappointment of unfulfilled

desires. After all, these cravings and fanatics are self-imposed. Without these cravings, life is inherently free and self-sufficient.

Thus, the essence of decluttering is not just about letting go of material goods but, more importantly, about releasing the grip of our attachments to both our ego and the material world. Meditation and mindfulness practices can help illuminate these dependencies and cravings, enabling us to recognize them as mere illusions in our mind, just like clouds in the sky, and thus they will not be able to control us anymore.

## **6. Mental Garbage**

According to Yogacara Buddhism, spiritual practice is essentially about transforming reliance. This reliance represents our current state of existence. It's worth pondering: are we mindful, compassionate, wise, and gentle, or are we consumed by greed, aversion, jealousy, arrogance, restlessness, depression, and boredom? Most people today

belong to the latter category. But why is this so? Why are our minds always filled with garbage?

Each thought or impulse does not simply disappear after it arises; it leaves an imprint, planting seeds in our minds. The traces left will invariably be negative mental patterns if we navigate life non-selectively, driven by mere habit. This is because the life of an ordinary person is a perpetuation of greed, aversion, and ignorance. We are habitually greedy, irritable and oblivious. It is imperative to cultivate mindfulness through meditation to see what is in our minds and our mental activities at the moment. Only by clearly understanding these can we consciously choose to cultivate positive mental states and discard the negative ones.

Initially, our capacity for such awareness may be limited. And even when we do notice, changing ourselves can be challenging. This difficulty arises from deeply entrenched habits accumulated over innumerable lifetimes, which are hard to reverse. That is why many people say, “I know

what I should do, but can't do it." However challenging, it's crucial to persist; otherwise, the accumulation of mental garbage will continue to enslave us.

Transformation of reliance involves changing the very essence of our lives, unlocking the innate potentials for awakening, liberation, and great compassion. This process requires letting go of the ordinary mind and cultivating the bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment. Thus, decluttering is not just about renunciation but also actively unveils life's inherent treasures that are obscured by ignorance. By clearing away the mental garbage, we unlock our capacity to tap into the splendid qualities of life.

Fundamentally, decluttering is about relinquishing the three poisons of our lives: greed, aversion, and ignorance.

# III

## WHY IS IT DIFFICULT FOR MODERN PEOPLE TO PRACTICE DECLUTTERING

Many people may agree with the principles of decluttering after learning about them but find it's not so easy. It is a classic case of "easier said than done." Why is that? I believe there are several factors at play.

### **1. Lack of Religious Belief**

How does religious belief relate to decluttering?

First, having a religious belief can help us define our

ultimate goals. Once we understand our true purpose, material possessions naturally lose their appeal. For instance, some religions view ascension to heaven as the ultimate aim, rendering all earthly matters fleeting and illusory. Essentially, decluttering isn't just about getting rid of material stuff; it's about prioritizing what's truly important. It helps us discern what to let go of and why. While excess belongings cluttering our space are visible and often acknowledged, we tend to overlook how superfluous relationships and mental clutter can drain our life energy, leaving us physically and mentally exhausted. Thus, discernment is crucial for our life's journey. From a Buddhist standpoint, the ultimate objectives are enlightenment and liberation, and to lead all beings toward these ends. Anything that doesn't support or hinder this goal should be consciously discarded.

Second, religious belief nurtures compassion and wisdom, breaking the habitual tendencies of greed, aversion, and ignorance. Although worldly sages also value love and wisdom, only Buddhism takes these virtues to their

highest level. The type of compassion Buddhism advocates is universal and unconditional, characterized by complete selflessness and altruism. In contrast, the conventional notions of love often carry an element of self-interest. Even the universal love advocated by some religions is differentiated between believers and non-believers, thus unable to embrace all beings inclusively. The wisdom in Buddhism pertains to realizing life’s true nature and liberating oneself from all forms of suffering. Armed with such wisdom, we perceive “all phenomena are like dreams, illusions, bubbles or shadows.” Is there anything to cling to? This perspective provides a vital philosophical foundation for the practice of decluttering.

Some might say that there are a large number of Buddhists in China and Westerners with religious beliefs. Yet, their attachment to worldly desires appears similar to ordinary people’s and has not decreased. Why is this the case? The answer lies in the depth of one’s faith. Some people adopt religious beliefs only to serve their worldly life. For example, a person might burn incense and place offerings at a

temple with the hope of earning more money, staying safe or wishing for things to go smoothly. This is not genuine faith and naturally will not achieve the transformative effects that true belief can inspire.

## **2. Overlooking Spiritual Pursuits**

The concept of “spiritual goals” might be familiar to many, but when it comes to articulating “what are your spiritual pursuits?” Many people struggle to articulate their thoughts clearly. In our daily lives, we’re bombarded with messages about material pursuits, from TV and smartphone screens to billboards and elevator ads, all dazzling and demanding our attention. As these messages continuously engage and occupy our six senses, the room for spiritual pursuits is repeatedly compressed and devoured.

Moreover, people can see that material possessions are impermanent; having something today doesn’t mean it will be ours tomorrow, let alone forever. This realization



intensifies feelings of insecurity. It is like someone adrift at sea, clinging to a floating object for survival; asking them to let go is difficult due to their fear of sinking. Similarly, when we place all our dependence on material things and adopt a “more is better” attitude, how can we be expected to cut off, let go or detach? The problem is that clinging doesn’t secure anything; it only makes us more anxious while we have it and more distressed when we lose it.

So, how do we address this issue? The ancients revered the “joy of Confucius and Yan Hui,” a form of happiness unaffected by material conditions. Even in modest circumstances, described as “a simple meal and drink in a humble alley, people could not endure such hardship,” they maintained their contentment. In today’s rapidly changing world, if we seek inner peace and true wealth, we too must prioritize our spiritual aspirations. This is the foundation for a stable and fulfilled life, unshaken by external changes and undiminished by the amount of material wealth. With this inner strength, we can easily make choices rather than hoarding blindly, desperately

clutching everything.

### **3. Glorifying Material Success**

In the past, people aspired towards virtues and wisdom, looking up to those who possessed both as role models. Nowadays, the objects of envy are wealth and pleasures, with wealth rankings serving as the benchmark for success. Even those who don't make it onto these lists get caught up in comparisons—measuring success by achieving one's career, the price of one's house, or the luxury of one's car. Within such a value system, material possessions are imbued with symbolic significance, tightly intertwining material wealth with personal identity. Possessions come to represent success and worth. Given the importance placed on material goods, it's no wonder that letting go becomes challenging. This is one reason why embracing decluttering is so difficult.

In my talks with business leaders, I often delve into the notion of what it means to be successful. The prevailing

view measures success regarding career achievements, wealth, and social standing—a rather narrow perspective. After all, life is more than just these aspects. Can a person be deemed successful if they have a vast enterprise but lack moral integrity, possess great wealth but show little compassion, or hold high status but engage in corruption? It’s clear that success should be assessed through a broader life perspective, not just through material gains.

The Confucian perspective on success is grounded in personal development. It assesses success through virtues, accomplishments, and influential words. Cultivating virtues is about self-improvement and inspiring others through moral character; achieving accomplishments refers to contributing to society; and influential words involve educating and enlightening the public. On the other hand, Buddhism views success through the lens of liberation, aiming for benefiting self and others as the ultimate fulfillment. By setting such goals, our attachment to material possessions diminishes.

#### **4. Powerless to Break Free from Dependency**

Many people find decluttering difficult because they see everything useful, making it hard to break free from material dependence. This struggle stems partly from a lack of spiritual pursuit and the glorification of materialism, and partly from a deficiency in the disciplined practice of precepts, concentration, and wisdom. These lead to a habitual reliance on material possessions and thus, unable to let go. The former issue is a matter of skewed perspectives, while the latter indicates a lack of mental strength.

Therefore, we not only need to recognize the true nature of material possessions and establish spiritual goals, understanding what truly holds value, but also need to cultivate mental stability and focus. Achieving mindfulness allows us to assess our possessions and the thoughts they trigger objectively. When the urge to acquire or the reluctance to discard arises, recognizing these impulses as mere thoughts—not indicative of our true needs—is crucial. By letting go of dependencies, we can make decisions based

on real-life necessities, decisively cutting off or letting go when necessary, rather than being swayed by attachments and desires, struggling between keeping and discarding.

### **5. Lack of Generous Spirit**

Due to greed and stinginess toward material things, some people, after accumulating wealth or belongings, deem everything too precious to part with, even items they have no use for or that might deteriorate over time. Additionally, some might not be particularly materialistic but still lack a spirit of generosity, missing out on the practice of sharing with others. These are also obstacles to the practice of decluttering.

To tackle these challenges, it's essential to recognize the value of giving and to foster an attitude of altruism. In the Bodhisattva Path, which encompasses the Six Perfections and the Four Means of Embracing, generosity is consistently the initial step. The Six Perfections start with generosity, leading to practices like ethical discipline,

endurance, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom. Similarly, the Four Means of Embracing begins with the act of giving, followed by kind speech, beneficial actions, and collaborative work. This highlights the importance of generosity, which not only breaks down the barriers of greed but also helps build good karma, accumulate spiritual resources, and create positive connections with others. Beyond material giving, generosity also includes sharing Dharma and offering protection or courage, which is a vital pathway to cultivating compassion.

By establishing religious beliefs, setting spiritual goals, reshaping our values, strengthening our minds through precept, concentration, and wisdom, and nurturing a heart of generosity and altruism, we can overcome the obstacles to decluttering, both theoretically and practically.

# IV

## HOW TO PRACTICE DECLUTTERING

As followers of Buddhism, how do we approach decluttering differently from the conventional understanding of Danshari? Let me share with you five aspects:

### **1. Establishing the Right Views**

Decluttering is not merely about organizing and discarding objects; it must be rooted in a philosophy of life and wisdom. Therefore, having the Right View is crucial. Ordinary people constantly center around the concept of self, clinging to their bodies, thoughts, and emotions, and extending this attachment to their families, careers,

possessions, and relationships. Without the wisdom of dependent origination, we easily mistake external aspects as extensions of the “self.”

What truly represents the “self”? Can our bodies, thoughts, possessions and relationships define us? In reality, these are merely conditional and illusory associations. Why do we habitually identify these with the “self”? It’s due to ignorance and a lack of clarity about what the “self” truly is that we seek validation through various external means, believing that the more we cling to it, the stronger the “self” appears to be.

In practicing Buddhism, one must use the wisdom of dependent origination to see clearly that everything we identify with the “self” cannot represent the true nature of the “self.” Otherwise, such misidentifications become the root of our afflictions. For example, parents who view their children as possessions and overly interfere in their lives end up causing pain for both parties. This common issue arises from the confusion of boundaries, failing to



recognize that children are independent beings, not extensions of themselves. Even close familial relationships don’t represent the “self,” not to mention our material possessions.

The wisdom of dependent origination shows us that our conceived self and possessions lack inherent existence, are only temporarily linked to us, and are in constant flux. Clinging to them as integral to the self invites suffering. This explains our aversion to aging, devaluation of wealth, or career downturns. When such changes affect others, they seem natural, but when they impact us, they’re intolerable. Why? Because it’s perceived not merely as change but as a direct damage to the “self.”

Decluttering works the same way. Objectively deciding what to part with isn’t particularly challenging. The real difficulty arises once these items are connected with the “self.” These attachments are sticky and subjectively biased, making it difficult to resolve the complex situation. Thus, by establishing the Right View and learning

to perceive the world, our lives, and all aspects of our existence through the lens of dependent origination, we can embrace the middle way and make decisions with moderation.

## **2. Adjusting Values**

While values may seem like a philosophical topic disconnected from reality, they actually underpin our everyday decisions. The choices we make about what to keep and what to discard are not random; they're guided by our value system. We pursue and act on what we consider important or beneficial. If our values are flawed, everything we do will also deviate.

Over the past few decades, Chinese traditional values have significantly shifted with the impact of Western culture. The pursuit of a profit-first, materialistic mindset, led to a series of social issues. On a global scale, the rush for earning, spending, and exploiting the environment has led to the rapid depletion of resources that took billions of years

to form and were rapidly consumed within just 200 years. I’ve often addressed environmental themes in talks like “The Return to Essence of Life” and “Buddhist Views on Environment.” Sadly, the issues mentioned have only intensified, from ocean pollution and rising temperatures at the poles to increasingly frequent extreme weather events. Disasters are inching closer, with unprecedented heat waves currently affecting many. It’s a critical moment for humanity to reflect; otherwise, the history we’re witnessing might become a narrative of irreversible destruction.

So, how can we change this trend and shift away from materialism? We must reshape our values based on Eastern wisdom. As foundational life principles, Confucianism advocates benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, faithfulness, kindness, respect, frugality, and humility. It advocates for a life marked by ethical integrity, societal contributions, and lasting influence, encouraging us to be morally upright individuals who serve the public good rather than narrowly self-interested. Buddhism sets its sights on enlightenment and liberation as the ultimate

aspirations. By aligning with these values and cultivating our lives around the teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, we stand a chance to reorder the world and change the deteriorating current situation.

The main differences between Eastern and Western cultures lie in two aspects. First is the relationship between humans and the world: Western culture is based on changing the world, believing that technological progress and wealth creation can bring happiness. Eastern culture, on the other hand, emphasizes self-transformation. Confucianism, for instance, begins with self-cultivation, extending to family harmony, state governance, and universal peace, transitioning from personal betterment to serving society. Buddhism teaches that “a pure mind leads to a pure land,” which echoes the idea of changing oneself to transform the world. How does one behave properly? It hinges on the theory of human nature. I have discussed with Zhu Hanmin, dean of Yuelu Academy, about “how to establish the mind and life.” We concluded that a commonality between Confucianism and Buddhism is the

focus on understanding and adjusting one’s mind to subsequently benefit the world, embodying an inside-out approach.

Second is the notion of self versus no-self. Western humanism advocates for the liberation of individuality and respects the fulfillment of personal values. This is a big step forward compared to medieval feudal beliefs. Yet, in the process of this liberation, failing to grasp the true essence of the “self” can lead to ego attachment, resulting in the exaggeration of human characteristics. Thus, while this trend has contributed to the Renaissance and development of science and technology, it has also led to serious social and environmental crises. On the other hand, Buddhism’s Right View, founded on the concept of no-self, fosters genuine equality and harmony among all beings, preventing harm to others and nature in the pursuit of desires.

### **3. Cultivating Precepts, Concentration, and Wisdom**

Decluttering involves more than just a shift in mindset; it requires the practical application of precepts (ethical conduct), concentration (meditative focus), and wisdom.

Firstly, precepts guide us towards a simple, pure, orderly, and disciplined life. In our modern world, brimming with material goods and a culture of consumption, it's too easy to lose our way, complicating our lives and muddling our minds. Establishing clear behavioral guidelines becomes especially important in such a context. Living in our retreat center, for instance, provides a serene atmosphere and a structured routine, where we individually uphold the Five Wonderful Mindfulness Trainings and collectively live in the Spirit of the Six Principles of Harmony. Thus, we support one another and foster positive influences.

Buddhism emphasizes self-reliance and reliance on the Dharma, meaning one should depend on oneself and the system. Before his passing, Buddha cautioned his disciples:

“Monks, after my demise, you should respect and cherish the Pratimoksha (monastic rules), as if someone in darkness finding light, or a poor discovering treasure. Know that these are your great teachers as if I were still alive.” This means taking the precepts as one’s guide, living according to the system rather than following a particular leader. Of course, this does not conflict with the importance of associating with virtuous teachers. While guidance from wise teachers is necessary for practice, living and coexisting within a community should be governed by law rather than by individuals. This law is the monastic code of conduct.

The basic five precepts for lay followers, which we recite daily as the Five Wonderful Mindfulness Trainings, are to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and consuming intoxicants. Living according to these precepts is itself the best form of decluttering. The monastic precepts are even stricter; monks observe 250 precepts and nuns 348, which include numerous rules regarding their clothing, food, shelter, and behavior. These rules not only

minimize the possessions one can have but also involve a decluttering of actions, instructing disciples on what they should and should not do.

Next is concentration, the practice of decluttering our mind from its thoughts. In today's restless age, people are often distracted and disorganized, adrift in a sea of thoughts. Concentration allows us to bring mindfulness to each moment through the practice of "samatha" and "vipassana(calming and insight meditation)." When walking, we focus solely on walking; when eating, we concentrate just on eating; when working, we are fully engaged in the task; when meditating, we are fully absorbed in the object of meditation. By choosing a single point of focus, the mind holds onto that one thing, and all other thoughts are temporarily cut off. Some people believe that multitasking is more efficient. However, this approach actually increases mental dispersion. Over time, it leads to losing focus, and the mind becomes overwhelmed. This is similar to a computer with too many windows open simultaneously, leading to insufficient CPU resources and



causing slowdowns or crashes.

The third is wisdom, the ability to see the truth. If precepts pertain to decluttering objects and actions, and concentration relates to decluttering thoughts, then wisdom truly cuts off the roots of greed, aversion, and ignorance. While precepts and concentration involve making choices, the underlying defilements of greed, aversion, and ignorance are only temporarily subdued and not entirely eradicated; they may resurface. The practice of wisdom involves awareness training to develop the mind’s clarity. This allows one to maintain a distance from thoughts, recognize them as they arise, and then resolve them through contemplation. This is the key to moving towards enlightenment.

With the integration of precepts, concentration, and wisdom, we achieve the complete practice of decluttering.

#### **4. Sravakas and Decluttering**

The term “sravaka” here mainly refers to those who have

chosen monastic life. Monasticism is a tradition that spans various Indian religions, not exclusive to Buddhism. In Brahmanism, which boasts over 3000 years of history, a follower's life is segmented into four stages: the period of studentship (Brahmacharya), the period of household life (Grihastha), the period of forest-dwelling (Vanaprastha), and the period of renunciation (Sannyasa). After fulfilling their worldly duties, individuals would leave their families to engage in meditation and ascetic practices in solitude. In early China, instead of monastics, some hermits similarly renounced worldly desires to lead secluded lives of transcendence. On his travels to advise the rulers, Confucius would occasionally be mocked by the hermits he encountered. In their view, his efforts were overly worldly and unwise.

Choosing the monastic life is in itself a profound act of decluttering, essentially a realization of the emptiness of worldly pursuits. However, it's important that this choice arises from understanding the inherent suffering in samsara—the cycle of existence, rather than as an escape

from life’s hardships. The Buddhist notion of renunciation is a proactive choice made upon seeing life’s true nature. The Buddha’s renunciation was such a monumental sacrifice; he left behind not only his family and wealth but also a kingdom sought after by many. His example inspired numerous royals and nobles, like Bodhisattva Shantideva and Atisha, both of royal lineage, to embrace a mendicant’s life devoid of material possessions.

In the early monastic community, monks lived on alms, a practice still preserved in some Theravada monasteries today. This lifestyle aims for utmost simplicity, where even daily sustenance is not a concern, let alone managing wealth, allowing for total dedication to internal cultivation and external propagation of the teachings. According to monastic rules, monks are allowed to own only the most basic necessities, such as the six requisites or the hundred-and-one items, ensuring a minimalist lifestyle. Any excess requires formal renunciation procedures to ensure adherence to simplicity. Furthermore, interpersonal relationships within the monastic community are

straightforward. Monks live according to the Dharma, with all affairs governed by specific monastic procedures, ensuring smooth operations regardless of the community's size—a stark contrast to the complex management systems in modern society that often lead to complications.

After Buddhism was introduced to China, the practice of alms-seeking wasn't adopted due to different cultural perceptions. Instead, under the guidance of ancestral masters, the tradition of “a day without work is a day without food” was established. However, the principle of simplicity remained in daily life, with simple robes and vegetarian meals, and no accumulation of material possessions.

In summary, becoming a monk or nun represents the ultimate form of Decluttering. Regardless of the time or place, or how life's details change, this spiritual essence remains consistent; otherwise, it contradicts the initial purpose of renunciation. Compared to the past, modern monastics face numerous tasks and social engagements that can disrupt their practice if without strong concentration

and an ideal management system. Hence, following the Buddha’s teachings, taking precepts as our guide, and embracing a simple life can help reduce attachments and foster both internal cultivation and external propagation of the Dharma.

### **5. Chan Practitioners and Decluttering**

The lifestyle of Chan practitioners is well documented in texts like *The Record of Pointing at the Moon* and *The Transmission of the Lamp*. They lived in unimaginable poverty, ate pine pollen, wore lotus leaves, and lived in thatched huts, yet they found joy in such existence. Why? Because Chan practitioners recognize that true awareness, or the awakened nature, is the ultimate treasure, far surpassing the value of the material world. Buddhas and bodhisattvas, who unlock this treasure, can benefit beings infinitely. By following their path, one can also realize what the Buddha realized. With this insight, who would still care about worldly fame and pleasures?

The plaque “Seek Not Outside,” commonly found in temples, reminds us that our true treasure lies within, accessible to everyone, which does not increase in the enlightened nor decrease in the ordinary. This isn’t just philosophical talk; it’s a reality that can be experienced through dedicated practice. Chan masters of the past, having achieved profound realization, were untroubled by life and death, unmoved by honor or disgrace, feeling no lack even in utter destitution. In contrast, even with an immense fortune that could last multiple lifetimes, modern people still do not feel rich because their inner desires remain unfulfilled, always craving more.

Greed breeds scarcity. The more we covet, the emptier our lives become, a void no amount of material wealth can fill. I often remark that people nowadays are incessantly digging holes—the more capable they are, the more holes they dig, and then spend their lives trying to fill these holes, only to dig more in the process. For instance, a businessperson might start with a small venture, filling one hole with success. Yet, in seeking expansion and

taking out loans, they only enlarge the hole, and this cycle continues until the hole is too vast to fill, leading to collapse when financial support fails—a fate not uncommon in the business world.

The more external desires we have, the larger the internal void. And this void signifies scarcity; the more we lack, the poorer we become. Chan practitioners, however, tap directly into the inner wealth. Realizing this, they remain content, serene, and joyful regardless of their material conditions. External factors like life and death, honor and disgrace, gain and loss, can't touch them.

Following the Buddha's enlightenment, many young royals became his disciples. After ordaining and diligently practicing, one prince was often overtaken by joy, exclaiming, “Joy, oh what joy!” When asked why, he explained, “In the palace, amidst luxury and constant attendance, surrounded by guards, I felt only weariness and boredom. Now, owning nothing, I'm free from all worries and find endless joy in my practice.”

What is true wealth? It's the sense of completeness without possessing anything. Chan practitioners live this truth. They meditate by rivers and under trees, unbound and therefore joyful. This inner abundance cannot be attained through any material possession. What else could they find it hard to give up?



# V

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DECLUTTERING

What does Decluttering truly mean? In other words, what kind of life can practicing Decluttering bring us? I see this unfolding in nine aspects:

### **1. Natural Living**

Decluttering encourages us to step back from materialistic desires and reconnect with nature. China was originally an agricultural society that was deeply connected to the land. However, as modern society has shifted its focus to commerce, expanding urban areas into rural spaces, our

bond with the natural world has weakened. It's often said that we live in the best and worst times. Despite enjoying conveniences like never before, from smartphones to high-speed trains, the price includes overexploitation of resources and significant environmental harm. Only when such damage becomes irreversible do we realize the true value of our natural surroundings—lush mountains and lucid waters—as the real treasures that sustain development and nurture our well-being. In some countries, “forest bathing” has even been prescribed by doctors as a treatment for certain health conditions.

Nature has a healing power. Children in the past, with few toys, played freely outdoors, vibrant and full of life. Today's children, however, grow up playing video games and scrolling through phones, with adults similarly hooked on electronic devices. In just over a decade, we've seen a rapid increase in visible issues like myopia and neck disorders. However, the greater danger lies in the psychological problems these habits foster. Without change, we risk becoming like plants deprived of light, gradually

losing our vitality.

Thus, we must break free from material shackles and embrace nature. “With the blossoms of spring, the moon in autumn, the cool breezes of summer, and the snow in winter—if one’s heart is free from unnecessary worries, every season is indeed wonderful to be alive.” Only when our minds are uncluttered can we truly appreciate and draw sustenance from the natural beauty around us, finding tranquility in its embrace.

## **2. Simple living**

Decluttering guides us toward a life of simplicity. Our desires are constantly increasing in a society that promotes consumption and continuous economic growth. Over 2000 years ago, the Buddha already cautioned us, “Contentment is the greatest treasure. The content rests easy, even on the ground, while the discontented find no peace, even in heaven. The discontent lives in poverty despite their wealth, whereas the content is rich even in their

poverty.” The ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi similarly reflected, “Contemporary gentlemen risk their lives and forsake their essence for material gain—how sorrowful!” It’s evident that minimizing desires is essential for happiness. The fewer desires one has, the easier it is to be satisfied and happy. As the saying goes, “Contentment brings constant happiness.”

Why is it hard for modern individuals to find contentment? Previously, people’s worldviews were limited to their immediate surroundings, with little to compare themselves to. Nowadays, we’re exposed to global lifestyles, extravagant indulgences of the super-rich, and the pervasive message of success literature that “you can have it too,” endlessly inflating our desires. If the environment influenced people’s contentment in the old days, today, we must consciously strengthen our willpower to impose restraints actively. As the more desires we harbor, the harder they are to satisfy, raising the cost of our happiness. This brings unnecessary suffering when those desires go unmet.

What Decluttering advocates is a shift from a material-centric to a people-centric approach. What does it mean to be people-centric? Many believe that even with abundant possessions, they remain self-centered—“because I need these things, having them makes me happy.” They fail to see that they’re driven by temptation and bound by desires, which makes them unable to control their shopping. When the impulse passed, they regretted it so much that they wanted to “chop off their hands” to show their determination.

Being people-centric means grounding our considerations in our being: What kind of life do I want to build? What do I truly need, find useful, and healthy? After a thorough examination, we will find that life really does not need so many things. When not controlled by material desires, we free up more time to invest in spiritual pursuits and develop hobbies and interests.

### 3. Leisurely living

Decluttering empowers us to escape the hustle and establish a leisurely lifestyle. A defining trait of modern life is being perpetually busy—busy earning money, busy consuming, busy harming the environment. With more money comes the fear of devaluation, leading to even more time invested in managing finances. It's a cycle where we become servants to material possessions, burdened by them.

Driven by desires, people are caught in a relentless loop of acquisition, comparison, and competition. It begins with the desire to own more—from clothing and handphones to cars and houses, with the belief that more is always better. Then comes comparison, where having more is never enough; there's always a desire to outdo others. Society is divided into various circles, and just when you've climbed to the top of one, entering another puts you back at the bottom, prompting a fresh struggle to climb to the top. This pursuit of comparison leads to competition,

fostering a sense of self-importance, superiority, and control. We might think these feelings define “us,” but in reality, they’re signs of an unhealthy mental state. It’s when you’re under their control that you become truly enslaved, tirelessly working for them.

Often, the more we have, the more we end up pursuing, making us busier than ever. Only by freeing ourselves from these desires and reducing our needs can our lives become simpler and more composed, and our minds become free and at ease.

#### **4. Organized Living**

Decluttering enables us to break free from disarray and chaos, paving the way for a more organized life. In reality, very few people live up to their ideals and feel satisfied with themselves. Many are discontent with their actions and lifestyle but feel powerless to change due to ingrained habits, laziness, and bad habits.

Tidying up our physical spaces can be a more straightforward and accessible starting point than overhauling our lifestyles. We can kick-start breaking old patterns using Decluttering to create a clean and orderly environment. This can extend to improving our diet, behavior, and daily routines. Committing to these changes for 21 days, or even one or two months, can help us gradually develop new habits, ensuring balanced eating, measured actions, and regular schedules. If doing it alone seems daunting, seeking support from our surroundings can be a game-changer. For instance, our retreat center offers a calm and disciplined setting where rules and communal efforts aid in establishing a structured life. It's not about others needing you to change; it's about you wanting to become better.

## **5. Quality Living**

Decluttering can lead us to a meaningful and high-quality life. We should ask ourselves: Does our current lifestyle truly have quality? Does it have meaning? Among the



things we do, say, and think daily, which contribute positively to our growth and enhance our lives, and which are merely killing time or polluting our inner selves? The reality for many is that their existence is cluttered with a mishmash of negative emotions and plus a heap of mistaken thoughts, constantly generating and discarding mental trash.

Life is an endless accumulation, and its quality hinges on the essence of our being. When shopping, we opt for the best quality within our means, yet we often overlook the kind of “life product” we are. If we recognize that the quality of our life is fundamental, something that stays with us always and is key to our happiness, surely, no one doesn’t want to be a “premium product.”

How can we enhance our quality? Confucianism teaches that “learning is for the self-realization of the individual.” Humans don’t develop simply by nourishing their bodies; that’s merely a natural process, indistinguishable from animals. What distinguishes humans as the most intelligent

beings is wisdom and morality, attributes that must be honed through education. Buddhism, on the other hand, advocates for cultivating a noble life by renouncing evil and practicing virtue. This is reflected in our actions, speech, and thoughts. It starts with employing Decluttering to cut through greed, aversion, and ignorance, then diligently cultivating precepts, concentration, and wisdom to realize wisdom and compassion fully. When our deeds and intentions are imbued with quality and value, our lives inherently mirror that quality and value.

## **6. Pure Living**

Decluttering can transform the cluttered state of our lives into one of purity. In this era of material excess, we're surrounded by an overwhelming number of things, leading to chaos in both our environments and lifestyles. This clutter further muddles our thoughts, causing mutual interference and compounding the disorder. How do we change this situation?

First, we need to change our environment through decluttering. In a clean and tidy space, we can more clearly see the state of our minds and actions. Many share a common experience: in a messy space, our behavior tends to become reckless and undisciplined. However, in a clean and orderly setting, we naturally become more restrained, our mind settles more easily and we can effectively regulate our actions, words, and thoughts. Moreover, our practice should purge ignorance, restlessness, and tendencies towards greed, aversion, and ignorance, revealing the inherently pure mind “originally free of a single thing.” This represents the ultimate form of purity, which remains luminous and untainted in any circumstance.

## **7. Eco-Friendly Living**

Practicing Decluttering can lead us to alter our consumption habits, shifting from a materialistic focus to a lifestyle emphasizing sustainability and environmental consciousness. The ongoing deterioration of our environment is intricately linked to our high-consumption lifestyles.

The saying “No buying, no killing” not only addresses the issue of taking life but is also applicable to environmental harm. Without the extreme expansion of desires, people wouldn’t need so many things, thus reducing the resources consumed and the amount of waste generated. Poor consumption habits turn vast resources into products, quickly becoming waste that the Earth can no longer sustain.

No one can truly answer how many products exist worldwide, as new items are introduced every day. Among them are a large number of disposable and fast-moving consumer goods. Their low cost and convenience make them widely accessible and appealing to the average person. But is it only money that we’re spending on these purchases? Behind this consumption lies the depletion of ever-scarcer resources and an increasingly fragile ecosystem. Therefore, we should embrace a low-carbon, eco-friendly lifestyle, reducing desires while fostering a respect for nature and a commitment to protecting the environment.

## **8. Altruistic Living**

Decluttering can help us lessen ego attachment, shifting our focus from self-centeredness to living for the benefit of others. While Buddhism emphasizes self-benefit and benefiting others, “self-benefit” refers to positive growth and development. Selfishness, on the contrary, not only fails to benefit oneself but also opens the door to all kinds of decline. When people accumulate countless possessions and become engrossed in ownership, it fosters attachment to self and possessions, reinforcing the three senses of self and that everything exists to serve “me.” In reality, this mindset traps us, obscuring the greater purpose and meaning of life.

Practicing decluttering and letting go of unnecessary possessions and relationships can unveil a whole new world. Freed from the shackles of material goods, we gain more time for spiritual pursuits and personal development, evolving into quality individuals. With the burden of possessions lifted, we have more energy and resources to serve

society and benefit others, becoming a loving and compassionate person. The growth and joy that come from this transformation are incomparable to any material gain.

## **9. Enlightened Living**

Decluttering enables us to let go of our greed and embark on a life of awakening and liberation. The true essence of decluttering is about releasing our dependency and fixation on material possessions. Without this understanding, decluttering might just become an excuse for another round of shopping. It's not uncommon for some to end up purchasing even more after a decluttering session, caught in a cycle of discarding and acquiring, rationalized by making room for the new. This, however, goes against the very principle of decluttering.

At its heart, the practice is about overcoming dependencies and cravings, along with the habitual patterns of greed, aversion, and ignorance they foster. These are the roots of all suffering and the cycle of birth and death.

Liberation means freeing ourselves from these entanglements. In this sense, decluttering is a valuable ally on our path to enlightenment and freedom. Even if we don't reach such profound states right away, minimizing our reliance on material goods can offer immediate relief and a sense of freedom, something accessible to everyone.

Just as our bodies need metabolism to stay healthy, our lives need a similar renewal process. By letting go of attachments and cravings, we can release the heavy burdens on our minds. Thus, decluttering is also a practice that aligns with spiritual cultivation and Chan living principles. I encourage everyone to study, reflect, and implement these principles. For individuals, it can enhance our lives; for the world, it can help protect our environment; in the present, it can aid in adjusting our behavior and refining our minds; and ultimately, it can lead us towards liberation.

## 国际静心协会、静心学堂简介

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国家图书馆出版品预行编目(CIP)资料

从佛法视角谈「断舍离」 / 济群法师着.  
-- 初版. -- 新北市: 大千出版社, 2024.10  
面; 公分. -- (静心学堂丛书)  
中英对照  
ISBN 978-957-447-428-8(平装)

1.CST: 修身 2.CST: 佛教修持 3.CST: 简化生活

225.87

113013964

静心学堂丛书

## 从佛法视角谈「断舍离」

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作者: 济群法师

出版者: 大千出版社

发行人: 梁崇明

登记证: 行政院新闻局局版台省业字第224号

P.O.BOX: 中和市邮政第 2-193 号信箱

发行处: 23556 新北市中和区板南路 498 号 7 楼之 2

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初版: 西元 2024 年 10 月

I S B N : 978-957-447-428-8 (平装)

结缘品 (欢迎助印流通)

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