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## Liao-Fan's Four Lessons

### THE THIRD LESSON:

#### THE WAYS TO CULTIVATE GOODNESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

He said to her, "I have eaten your rice balls for three years with nothing to show my gratitude in return. Perhaps I can help you in this way. On the land behind your house, there is a good place for you to place your grave. If you are placed there in the future, the number of your descendants who will have imperial appointments will be equivalent to the number of seeds in a pound of sesame seeds". Her son followed his recommendations and buried her there.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When we see a person in dire circumstances, no matter who they may be, as long as we sincerely try to save his or her life, it will be considered a great act of goodness. Qi Han was a very famous general during the Song Dynasty. He was greatly admired by the Emperor who bestowed a noble honor to his title. General Qi Han was highly regarded in Chinese history; so, the heavenly being arranged for Qi Han to be reborn into the Feng family by being reincarnated into the Human Realm. It

was because Zhuo-An's father saved someone's life that he was rewarded with a good son. This also exemplifies that reincarnation within the Six Realms is factual. The ancient Chinese all deeply believed in it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

them that much money? The silver was certainly real. They decided that their son must still be alive and well. Not long after, their son returned home.

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

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

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

There is an old Chinese saying, “There is a thirty percent possibility that people may be afraid of ghosts, but a seventy percent probability that ghosts are afraid of people”. It is silly for us to be afraid of ghosts because they are much more afraid of us. Only when we have done something wrong do we need to be afraid of them because only then, are they able to harm us. If our conscience is clear, then malevolent spirits can do nothing to us. There are several books, which tell of such accounts. They are collected in several volumes, such as, Notes from Yuewei Chamber by Xiao-Lan Ji, Spiritual Collections by Sung-Ling Pu and the Twenty-five Books of Official Records. In the first year of the Republic of China, there was a publication called A Record of Response and Retribution in History. These all provide numerous examples of the Law of Cause and Effect.

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

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

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

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