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Essence of the Infinite Life Sutra - Venerable Master Chin Kung



EXCERPT FORTY FOUR

People in this world are born from interrelated karmic causes. How long can one live? Unvirtuous people are not proper in their behavior and thoughts. They usually harbor evil intentions and their minds are constantly preoccupied with immoral lust. Restlessness fills their minds, and their exterior persona reveals wantonness. They waste away their family fortune. What they do is unlawful. Things that they should seek, they are unwilling to.

“People in this world are born from interrelated karmic causes.” Society is the phenomenon of living beings existing together. No one can live independently. People have to rely on one another. Therefore, when one thinks about oneself, one must also think about others.

“How long can one live?” A human life span is short. Life is fragile. In this world, ten years can pass without a person attaining anything. Truly, this is like a dream. The ancient Chinese said, “Since ancient times, few live to the age of seventy.” Now, although medicine has advanced and life spans seem to have lengthened, in Africa and many other places where the living environment is very bad, people die of hunger and babies lose their lives every day. If we take this into account, the average life expectancy is less than seventy years.

People have shared karma and individual karma. Some people cultivate good fortune, so they have a longer life span. But even if they live to one hundred, this is still a short time. Therefore, seeing through this and letting go will definitely be beneficial for us.

“Unvirtuous people are not proper in their behavior and thoughts. They usually harbor evil intentions and their minds are constantly preoccupied with immoral lust. Restlessness fills their minds, and their exterior persona reveals wantonness. They waste away their family fortune.” This part of the excerpt talks about those whose afflictions, karmic obstacles, and bad habits are very severe. These people’s thoughts and behavior are not proper. They usually harbor evil intentions, and the thoughts of lust never cease. Therefore, their desires burn inside them like a fierce fire and this shows in their appearance—“their exterior persona reveals wantonness.” The immediate retribution is “wasting away their family fortune.” Such people are called spendthrift children or prodigal children.

“What they do is unlawful.” This refers to ruining other people’s reputations and moral integrity. In ancient times, this was very serious. Today, people attach little importance to this, nevertheless it is an obstacle to one’s cultivation, personal happiness, and a safe society. If one truly believes in cause, condition, and retribution, one will naturally understand.

“Things that they should seek, they are unwilling to.” The Buddha said this with deep feeling. Instead of seeking and doing what we should, we are unwilling to do so. What should we be seeking? Transcending the cycle of birth and death. This is what we should seek. It is a great suffering to be in the cycle of birth and death. The Buddha showed us a path to transcend the cycle. If we believe him and follow this path, our wish will be fulfilled.

This excerpt talks about the evil of sexual misconduct. The gravest offense of all is killing; the greatest obstacle to one’s cultivation is sexual desire. These are two great obstacles. If in one’s cultivation one wishes to transcend this world, one will not be able to transcend the Three Realms without eradicating sexual desire.

Although the Pure Land method allows one to bring one’s residual karmas into the Western Pure Land, one must suppress one’s sexual desire, anger, and ignorance. This way, one will be sure of attaining rebirth there. If one cannot suppress them, then no matter how much one chants the Buddha-name, it is as an ancient Chinese said: “Even if one chants until one’s throat is hoarse, one’s chanting is still futile.” One will only form a good affinity with Amitabha Buddha, but one will not succeed in attaining rebirth in the Pure Land in this lifetime.

EXCERPT FORTY FIVE

People in this world do not think of practicing goodness. They use divisive speech, harsh speech, false speech, and enticing speech. They detest and are jealous of virtuous people. They discredit the worthy and the wise. They are not filial to their parents, and they are not respectful to their teachers and elders. They are not trustworthy to their friends, and it is difficult for them to be sincere and honest. They are conceited and claim that they have attained the Way. They are wild and bully others. They encroach on the rights of others. They want others to fear and respect them, while they themselves feel neither fear nor shame. These people are stubborn and hard to transform. They constantly harbor arrogance and haughtiness. They rely on the protection of the good fortune from past lifetimes. They commit evil deeds in this lifetime and use up their good fortune. At the end of their lives, all their evil deeds will come back to overwhelm them.

This excerpt talks about the evils of false speech. False speech is dishonesty. If one is not honest, one will absolutely not succeed in one's cultivation. Why? Because cultivation requires a sincere mind. When one is not sincere in one's words, one's mind is false. How can one with a false mind succeed in cultivation? Even in this world, a person who is not trustworthy cannot have a place in society. One can deceive others for a short time but not forever.

"Divisive speech" is the sowing of discord. "Harsh speech" is speaking harshly and hurting others. "False speech" is telling lies to deceive people. "Enticing speech" is sweet words meant to deceive others. For example, songs, dance, movies, and dramas today lead people to have evil thoughts. All these are "enticing speech."

The arts in ancient China were all based on the standard of "no evil thoughts." For example, plays and novels taught people to understand the law of cause and effect—good deeds will bring about good retributions; bad deeds will bring about bad retributions. They promoted loyalty, filial piety, moral integrity, and justice. This is one way of teaching the general public.

Those who engage in entertainment and art should guide society in a positive direction, by teaching that which is virtuous or good. This way, they will have boundless good fortune. Otherwise, they will create evil karmas.

"They detest and are jealous of virtuous people." When they see virtuous people or good deeds being done, jealousy and anger arise in them.

They "discredit the worthy and the wise." A worthy person is a person of virtue. A person of virtue and wisdom can influence the people in an area, improve the social customs, and set a good example for the local people. His or her merit will be very great. If one is jealous of or dislikes this person and obstructs this person from doing his or her good deeds—sabotaging this person instead of helping or rejoicing at the good deeds—then the offense is grave, as it has affected all the people in the area.

"They are not filial to their parents, and they are not respectful to their teachers and elders." This shows extreme arrogance! This applies not only to the general public but also to Buddhist practitioners. The Visualization Sutra teaches us the Three Conditions. The first includes being filial and providing and caring for parents, being respectful to and serving teachers, being compassionate and not killing, and cultivating the Ten Virtuous Karmas.

Filial piety and respect for one's teachers are the absolute foundations. If one is not filial to one's parents or does not respect one's teachers, then there is no need to talk about other things. To show gratitude for the love and care given by one's parents, one should be respectful and filial to them. Both mundane and supramundane teachings are based on filial piety. Buddhism—a teaching where the teacher as well as the teachings are highly revered—is founded on filial piety. If the public ignores filial piety, then there is no foundation for Buddhism. Like building a house, if there is no foundation, how can the house stand firm?

"They are not trustworthy to their friends, and it is difficult for them to be sincere and honest." Due to the guidance of our teachers, we have wisdom and skills. This is a great kindness to us. If one thinks nothing of the kindness of one's parents and teachers, how can one be a friend?

In present society, it is indeed as described here. The relationships between people and between countries are based entirely on gains or losses, not on moral obligations and justice.

“They are conceited.” Because they are arrogant, they look down on their parents and teachers, thinking that their parents and teachers cannot compare with them and are not as capable as they. Therefore, they are arrogant to their elders.

They “claim that they have attained the Way.” If one claims that one has attained the Way but has not done so, it is a great lie. This lie deceives people and damages Buddhism, and the retribution is falling into the Avici hell.

“They are wild and bully others. They encroach on the rights of others.” This is tyrannizing others.

“They want others to fear and respect them, while they themselves feel neither fear nor shame.” Shame—being pricked by one’s conscience and caring about public opinion—is a good mental quality. “Feeling neither fear nor shame” means that one has no conscience and does not care about criticism from the public, ignoring it completely. This is why one dares to act unlawfully—one is full of oneself.

“These people are stubborn and hard to transform.” It is hard to change and reform these people.

“They constantly harbor arrogance and haughtiness.” They are proud and arrogant.

“They rely on the protection of the good fortune from past lifetimes.” Why does a bad person who rides roughshod over others enjoy high status, wealth, and power in society while not suffering any punishment? Because the good fortune he or she cultivated in past lifetimes is abundant—the conditions for the evil deeds done in this lifetime have not yet matured, so the retributions have not materialized.

It is stated in the sutras: “If you want to know the causes planted in past lifetimes, look at what you are experiencing in this lifetime. If you want to know your karmic effects in future lifetimes, look at what you are doing in this lifetime.” What we do in this lifetime will bring about retributions in future lifetimes. A good cause will bring about a good retribution. A bad cause will bring about a bad retribution. If a retribution has not happened, it is because the time has not yet come.

“They commit evil deeds in this lifetime and use up their good fortune.” One cultivated great good fortune in past lifetimes and could have enjoyed it for one hundred years. But because one commits evil deeds, one’s good fortune is used up in fifty years. This is the diminishing of good fortune. This is definitely not the gods and deities controlling this to punish one. It is due to one’s karmic forces. The karmic force of the evil deeds gets stronger and the karmic force of the virtuous deeds gradually becomes weaker. As the good karmas cannot counteract the evil karmas, the karmic force of the evil karmas will become stronger and stronger. Retributions from the stronger karma will be meted out first, pulling one to suffer them. This is the principle.

“At the end of their lives, all their evil deeds will come back to overwhelm them.” At the end of one’s life, the evil karmas will manifest, and one will have to suffer retributions. “All their evil deeds” refers to the evil paths. The karmic foes and creditors from this and past lifetimes will come to take one’s life if one owes them life or to collect debt if one owes them money. This is why Buddha-name chanting practitioners should dedicate merits from their learning, practicing, and giving—“repaying the Four Kinds of Kindness above, and relieving the suffering of those in the Three Paths below.

“Repaying the Four Kinds of Kindness above” means that the merits are dedicated to those who have shown us kindness. “Relieving the suffering of those in the Three Paths below” means that the merits are dedicated to the karmic foes and creditors from numerous kalpas. Throughout my entire life, I have been repaying debts with my cultivation. We make offerings to those who have shown us kindness, and we repay debts to our karmic creditors.

This way, we will eliminate many obstacles to our cultivation. This is the truth. When we truly understand, we will courageously and diligently learn and practice.

We should generate the bodhi mind, single-mindedly chant “Amitufofo,” and seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. This is an assured path. As an ancient eminent master said, “If ten thousand people practice [the Pure Land method], all ten thousand will attain rebirth.” So, we will surely succeed. Only when we attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land will we be able to truly repay those who have shown us kindness in past lifetimes and help those we have enmities with attain Buddhahood.

Therefore, only when we attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land can we resolve enmities with all beings.

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