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Essence of the Infinite Life Sutra - Venerable Master Chin Kung



EXCERPT THIRTY THREE

People in the world strive for things of little urgency. Amidst extreme evils and severe sufferings, they diligently work . . . dictated by their minds. . . . Whether they have or do not have, they worry.

“People in the world strive for things of little urgency.” “People in the world” refers to the beings in the Six Paths. “Of little urgency” means of no importance. The beings in the Six Paths all busy themselves with unimportant things and forget the important things such as (1) knowing the truth of life and the universe, (2) understanding the transmigration within the Six Paths, and (3) transcending the Six Paths.

“Extreme evils and severe sufferings” are karmic results. “Extreme” means severe. “Severe evils” refers to the Ten Evil Karmas: the physical karmas of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; the verbal karmas of false speech, divisive speech, harsh speech, and enticing speech; and the mental karmas of greed, anger, and ignorance. As the Ten Evil Karmas increase continually, they are called “extreme evils.” When one commits such extreme evils, how can one not suffer retribution! Great suffering is transmigration within the Six Paths; small suffering is the suffering in one’s present life, from birth to death.

“They diligently work . . . dictated by their minds.” “Mind” refers to greed, anger, ignorance, deluded mind, and

wandering thoughts. In this kind of environment, people work hard and busy themselves every day simply out of “greed, anger, ignorance,” and for “fame, prestige, gain, wealth,” the Five Desires, and the Six Dusts.

“Whether they have or not, they worry.” When one obtains something, one is afraid of losing it. When one does not have something, one craves it. So one worries both ways: when one has something and when one does not. This is the true picture of society and the world presently.

EXCERPT THIRTY FOUR

Parents and children, siblings, spouses, and relatives should respect and love each other, and should not be hateful or jealous of one another. They should share what they have with those who do not. They should not be greedy or stingy. Their speech and facial expression should always be gentle. They should not be defiant or unkind to one another.

“Relatives” refers to people of the same clan. People are together because of karmic links. Throughout our lives, the occasional meeting of someone is also due to a karmic link. More so, members of the same family—their link is even stronger.

Four kinds of karmic links exist between children and parents. The first is to repay kindness. In past lifetimes, they had a good and happy relationship with one another. The children come to repay kindness, so they are very filial.

The second is to exact revenge. The children are karmic debtors from past lifetimes. They are usually wastrels. When they grow up, they will cause the family’s ruin.

The third is to collect debt. It all depends on how much the parents had owed the children. If the parents did not owe much [previously], the children will die young. If the parents had owed the children a lot, the parents will spend a lot of money on the children’s education and take very good care of them, and the children will suddenly die when they are adults.

The fourth is to repay debt. The children owed the parents in past lifetimes. When the amount is a lot, the children will look after their parents very attentively.

If the children’s debt is little, they will take care of their parents just enough to ensure that their parents lack nothing. But there is no respect for their parents—the children only take care of their physical needs.

When these four kinds of karmic links exist between people, they will become family. People will become relatives or friends when the karmic link is weaker. When the link is stronger, people will become family.

If there is a bad karmic link with someone, any debt must be repaid. As is said “One who owes life will repay with a life. One who owes money will repay with money.” But education can help make amends. Teaching people will help them understand the truth, and any enmity can be resolved even if it was incurred in past lifetimes.

Education will help us transform bad karmic links into good ones and transform worldly-love affinity into Dharma affinity. This is most wonderful.

“Should respect and love each other” is the way to be a human being. Confucianism teaches the Five Cardinal Human Relationships and the Ten Obligations. Every person has ten different roles and should fulfill the obligation of each role. “Parents should love their children, and children should be filial to their parents; elder siblings should care for younger siblings, and younger siblings should respect elder siblings.” In a family, if one’s role is that of a son, one should fulfill filial piety. As a father, one should be kind and loving. Knowing human relationships and understanding one’s responsibilities—this is what education teaches us.

Education teaches one how to interact with others and lets one know one’s role in relation to others. Hence, the efficacies of education let us maintain harmonious and prosperous families, a stable society, a flourishing country, and a peaceful world. But today, education does not have these efficacies any more. The goal of education today is the exact opposite of that in the past.

“Should not be hateful or jealous of one another.” “Hateful” refers to a resentful heart, a jealous heart. We should expand our respect and love beyond the scope of our family and encompass society and all beings. This way, society will be harmonious and the world will be at peace. Then, we will truly be able to live peacefully and happily.

One cannot live alone and away from society. Therefore, in everything, one must consider the well-being of society. One must not harbor hatred or jealousy. When one encounters an adverse condition or situation, one should contemplate it over and over and find the root cause. One’s mind will naturally be calm and afflictions will not arise.

“They should share what they have with those who do not.” When we have more things than we need, we should voluntarily help those in need. In our daily life, we should take care of one another. Each being’s cultivation is different, thus the good fortune that each being has is different. Those who have great good fortune should take care of those who have little good fortune. This way, everyone will live in peace with one another.

If the rich are heartless—thinking of their own enjoyment and not caring about the suffering of others—society will be in turmoil. If the rich can take care of the poor, the poor would then be able to manage their lives. They will appreciate the kindness that the rich have shown them. Society will be peaceful and everyone can have a happy life.

If society is in turmoil, no matter how great one’s good fortune or wealth is, one will still have a miserable life.

We start with helping our family members and relatives, then gradually extend our help to all beings. Today, there are many young, virtuous people who are enthusiastic about learning. We should help them, so as to nurture them to become exceptional people for society, country, and the world—to bring benefit to all beings. The merit will be incomparably wondrous. When our children and relatives grow up, they will naturally have good fortune.

We should look far ahead.

“Should not be greedy or stingy.” “Stingy” means that we are unwilling to help others with what we have. When we are not greedy or stingy, we will have a broad mind and great good fortune.

“Their speech and facial expression should always be gentle.” This is saying that one should speak in a gentle way and always wear a smile.

The Buddha’s teachings pay great attention to this. This is why a Buddhist monastery or temple has an image of Maitreya Bodhisattva. This bodhisattva represents “speech and facial expression should always be gentle.”

“They should not be defiant or unkind to one another.” “Defiant or unkind” signifies that there are differences in opinion. When there are differences in opinion, there will be disputes. Consider the countries, ethnic groups, and political parties that have split up. Why did they split up? Because they had disagreements and could not reach a consensus. None would yield to the other.

Let us look again at the political leaders in ancient times, leaders who led people to a common understanding. How did they do this?

In China, since the time of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty, Confucianism was used to establish a common understanding. Later, Emperor Ming of the Han dynasty added Buddhism and Taoism. In other words, the Chinese were taught the Three Teachings.[32] Doing it this way was accepted by everyone. This educational method was used until the Qing dynasty. The method used by the emperors in the past was truly brilliant!

Today, everyone follows his or her own views. Those who agree are few, and those who disagree are many. Therefore, it is easy to split up.

This excerpt teaches us (1) how members of a family and their relatives should get along with one another and (2) how a family can become happy and harmonious. This is the foundation for our happiness throughout our lives.

If every person follows the Buddha’s teaching, he or she will behave properly and will not overstep the boundaries, even when there are differences in opinions or feelings of unfairness.

[32] Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.—Trans.

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