



美國波士頓行願淨宗學會 - 行願淨業林 Amita Buddhism Society - Boston, USA

25-27 Winter Street, Brockton MA. 02302 歡迎流通, 功德無量

Tel & Fax: Brockton (508)580 – 4349 Quincy(508)646 – 8168

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## Liao-Fan's Four Lessons

### THE FIRST LESSON:

#### LEARNING TO CREATE DESTINY

##### The Ways of Changing Destiny

##### B. To Reform Faults Thoroughly

To Teach Children to Know Their Faults, Reform, Cultivate and Accumulate Merit and Good Fortune

I came to understand that both good fortune and misfortune are incurred by our own actions. These are truly the words of sages and virtuous people! If one were to say that good fortune and adversity are all determined by the heavens, then I would consider that person to be ordinary.

These are Mr. Liao-Fan's true words of awakening. Great sages and virtuous people have true wisdom and are able to clearly see the true reality. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are unsurpassed sages.

This talks about a constant. What Mr. Kong foretold of Mr. Liao-Fan's destiny was common theories. What Master Yun-Gu taught him for changing his destiny were the teachings of sages and virtuous people. Knowing this, why would we need to have our fortune told? Do we need to ask fortune-tellers how to situate our house? Of course not! We need to believe in the teachings of sages and virtuous people, know that our destiny is within our control and that we can create our own bright and magnificent future.

Tian-Qi, my son, I wonder how your life will be? In any case of destiny we should always prepare for the worst. Therefore, even in times of prosperity, act as if you were not. When things are going your way, be mindful of adversity. And when you have enough food and clothing, be mindful of poverty.

Mr. Liao-Fan had his destiny accurately foretold. His son did not and thus did not know what would happen in his life. In actuality, there really was no need to know. Mr. Liao-Fan taught him that it was important to remember that even in times of prosperity, he was to act as if he was not prosperous. That even if he attained great wealth and social position, became a high ranking official with power and influence, he still needed to remember the times when he was not. Why was there a need to remember this? Because in the future, even if we become prosperous, we would do well to remain humble and courteous, not giving rise to arrogant thoughts or a haughty attitude that we have wealth and prestige while others do not. If we can remain humble then we will nurture true virtue and good fortune.

Even when everything is going very smoothly, we also need to remember when times were difficult. In this way, even when things are going our way we will remain cautious and not become careless. Ge-Liang Zhu was a famous Prime Minister (in the Shu Han Period of the Three Kingdoms, seventeen hundred years ago). He was able to remain successful throughout his life because he was careful and discreet.

Right now, even when we have more than enough food and clothing, we need to be thrifty. If we are able to constantly do this when we have wealth and prestige, then we will be able to improve in both moral conduct and benevolent behavior.

A good example in Chinese history was Mr. Zhong-Yan Fan. Mr. Fan was from a very poor family background. When he was young and

studying at way places, he had little to eat. Everyday he would cook a pot of porridge, divide it into four portions and eat one portion a meal. In this manner, he passed the days in a state of impoverishment. When he prospered later in life and became a Prime Minister (during the Song Dynasty, eight hundred years ago), he was under the supervision of the emperor and was in a higher position than everyone else. But he still maintained his simple manner of living and changed very little. When he earned more, he would think of those who were poverty-stricken and used his earnings to help them.

By reading his biography, we know that he supported over three hundred families. With the income of one person helping to provide for three hundred families, we know that he would also be living in impoverished conditions. If he had lived affluently, how would he have been able to provide for all those families?

He was truly one of China's great sages. The esteem that Master Yin-Guang had for him was second only to Confucius. Mr. Fan's descendants continued until the early part of this century. This is because he had fostered merits and virtues to last over one hundred generations. The family of Confucius is foremost as an old and well-known family, followed by that of Mr. Zhong-Yan Fan. Mr. Fan's family lineage remained strong through eight hundred years due to his exceptional cultivation and accumulation of merits.

Great good fortune is when we are able to share it with others for in this way our ensuing good fortune will become inexhaustible. The descendants of Mr. Fan continued this family tradition of helping others until the early part of this century. Throughout Chinese history, there were not many families who had accumulated this much great virtue. In his commentary, Master Yin-Guang told of another person, a Mr. Ye, the premier scholar of the Qing Dynasty. His family lineage remained strong for three hundred years, until the later years of the Qing Dynasty. It is thus obvious that the utmost priority of life is for us to refrain from wrongdoings, to cultivate good deeds and accumulate merits and virtues.

And when loved and respected by all, remain careful, apprehensive and conservative. When the family is greatly respected and revered, carry yourself humbly. When your learning is extensive and profound, always think that the more that you learn the less you feel that you know.

We would do well to avoid "Being overwhelmed by an unexpected favor". It is good for others to love and be protective towards us. However, we need to think, what is it about us that is worthy of this love and care? Is deserving of the respect of others? We need to be constantly apprehensive of the deficiencies in our virtuous abilities. It is good to think this way, to constantly reflect upon ourselves, to progress in our cultivation of virtue and not to disappoint the expectations of others.

Being humble and feeling that we are not knowledgeable enough are sufficient methods for eradicating our arrogance. Arrogance is one of the five major afflictions and is related to the other four afflictions of greed, anger, ignorance and doubt. Indeed, this was a very good place and a good way for him to start eradicating afflictions. In doing so completely, we will be able to uncover our virtuous nature, to truly achieve in our cultivation of merit.

When thinking of the past, we can advocate the virtues of our ancestors. When thinking of the present, we can conceal the faults of our own parents. When thinking of the country, we can think of how we can repay its kindness to us and when thinking of the family we can think of how to bring about our families' good fortune. When thinking of the outside, think of how to help those in need around us and when thinking of within think of how to prevent improper thoughts and actions from arising.

The following summarizes this chapter, which is very important for within it lies the key to creating destiny. What we are thinking inside will be the guidelines for increasing our virtue and morality and for developing good deeds. In the past, Chinese education taught of the relationships between humans, between humans and spirits, and between humans and nature. It taught to be constantly thinking far into the past, to honor and make known the virtues of our ancestors. If we were respected by society for our moral principles and ethics, knowledge and profession, we would honor our ancestors.

In today's society, what is the driving force behind hard work? Wealth, fame, prestige. Most people will do whatever is necessary to acquire these. Why? The attainment of wealth urges people, drives them forward. If there were no wealth to gain, who would be willing to work so hard? Very few! In the past, the driving force behind people's hard work was filial piety. In their mindfulness of their ancestors and parents, they did their best in cultivating and accumulating merits and virtues on their behalf and to honor them. This driving force is much worthier and nobler than that of wealth, fame and prestige. This has been the tradition of Chinese culture and Confucian teaching for several thousands of years.

Buddhism is also based on the foundation of filial piety. Thus, the ritual of making offerings to ancestors and the establishment of ancestral memorial halls is highly regarded, as it is the ultimate root and foundation of Chinese culture. If we are able to be filial towards parents and ancestors, able to remember our root, then we will naturally be able to think and conduct ourselves properly and to refrain from wrongdoings.

"When we are thinking of the present, we can conceal the faults of our own parents". (This discusses those who are) close to us. If the children are filial, have contributed to society then even if their parents have committed minor offenses, people will overlook and forget them. People will praise the parents for having raised such filial children.

"When thinking of the country, we can think of how we can repay its kindness to us". Above us, the country or government has the mission of being a responsible leader, parent and teacher to its citizens, of providing a place where people can live and work in peace and contentment. In return, the citizens should be loyal, patriotic and dedicate themselves to their country.

"When thinking of the family, we can think of how to bring about our families' good fortune". Below us is the family. Being mindful of the family does not just refer to the nuclear family, but to the extended family as it was thought of in the past, the immediate family as well as all relatives. As a member, we need to be mindful in creating family good fortune for the whole, not just for the immediate part. Therefore, when one person achieves good fortune, the extended family can also benefit from it.

"When thinking of the outside, think of how to help those in need around us". Always bear in mind the interests of society. We need to do all we can to serve society and to create good fortune for all others. In today's society, the most urgent need is reviving and developing the education of morality and ethics.

"When thinking of within, think of how to prevent improper thoughts and actions from arising". We need to prevent wandering and deviated thoughts from arising. We need to be mindful of what we are supposed to be doing and to let go of excessive ambitions. If all of us were able to do so, were able to fulfill our responsibilities, society would be fortunate and harmonious and the world would be at peace. Mencius explained that "If people of noble character and integrity can be loyal to their responsibility, then in this way the truth can be revealed".

In Confucian teaching, this responsibility refers to the five human relationships including those between husband and wife, parent and child, siblings, friends, political leaders and the public. He also spoke of the Ten Moral Responsibilities. All this means that we need to fulfill our responsibilities towards society and others. Whatever we have responsibility for, we need to accomplish earnestly and diligently in order to create good fortune for our family and society.

One needs to be able to find one's faults everyday and to correct them everyday. If one is unable to detect any faults in oneself then one will think that everything he or she does is all right. Then, they will be unable to correct their faults and improvement will be out of the question.

Awakening is being able to detect our faults daily. It is the perfect complete enlightenment. The beginning of enlightenment is to detect our faults daily. We start this process when we first bring forth our vow to become an Equal Enlightenment Bodhisattva. Once we

discover our faults daily, we need to correct them. This is cultivation. It is to correct our thoughts and behavior daily. It is the true achievement in the cultivation of great sages and virtuous people.

This is the key to changing our destiny, to leaving suffering behind and to attaining happiness. When most people are unable to become virtuous and sages in one lifetime and are unable to achieve in their cultivation, they will find that the problem lies here. To know our own faults daily is to awaken daily. Once we discover a fault, we would do well to correct it. In this way, we will build our strength of cultivation to sincerely reform. We gain strength from our cultivation. We need not do much. If we were to find and correct just one fault a day then we would become a sage or a virtuous person in three years.

As practitioners who chant the Buddha's name, if we are able to correct one fault daily and be mindful of Buddha Amitabha then in three years time we would achieve birth into either the high or middle birth levels of the Pure Land. This is the way to cultivate to become Buddhas. The question is whether we are willing to do so earnestly. We are deluded if we are unable to daily find one fault in ourselves. If we do not know them, then of course we cannot correct them. How can we hope to improve in this way? When there is no improvement, there is regression. Naturally, we would then fall behind. To regard ourselves as infallible, to be convinced that everything we do is correct is the most horrible way for us to live.

There are many intelligent people in the world who cannot make improvements in cultivating morality and virtue. Nor can they make improvements in their work. Their failures in this life are owed to a single word. Laziness.

If we live for the present, are lethargic and lazy then we will be bound by our fate. How we are born and die, where we will go after we die all accords with our destinies. Master Yun-Gu addressed people like this as ordinary people, as philistines who completely follow what has been destined. They are what the Buddha called "pitiful creatures". These principles, which Mr. Liao-Fan taught his son are the principles for both worldly education as well as Buddhism and must not be ignored.

Tian-Qi, the teachings of Master Yun-Gu are truly the most worthy, profound, real and proper teachings, and I hope that you will be well-versed in them and practice them diligently. You must use your time wisely and not let it slip by in vain.

Mr. Liao-Fan carefully wrote down the principles and methods that the Master had taught him in changing his destiny and passed them on to his son, hoping that he too would cultivate following this method. Mr. Liao-Fan had received remarkable results from this practice and thus firmly believed in all the principles and methods that the master had taught.

We need to be very familiar with Master Yun-Gu's teachings, to ponder them deeply to carefully appreciate the meanings within. When we are constantly mindful of the teachings, we will savor them, then use them as the basis for our own behavior and practice them diligently. We should not waste this lifetime or allow it to pass pointlessly.

**Web link to the article:** <http://www.amtb.cn/e-bud/chinese/chinese.htm>

**English website on how to practice Pure Land Buddhism:** <http://www.amitabuddha.co.cc>

**Boston Amita Buddhism Society new website:** <http://www.amtb-ma.org/>

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