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## Essence of the Infinite Life Sutra - Venerable Master Chin Kung



### EXCERPT NINETEEN

They should practice good deeds, such as (1) no killing, (2) no stealing, (3) no sexual desire, (4) no lying, (5) no enticing speech, (6) no harsh speech, (7) no divisive speech, (8) no greed, (9) no anger, and (10) no ignorance.

“They should practice good deeds” refers to the Ten Virtuous Karmas, which are the standards for our thoughts and for our interacting with others and engaging in tasks. If one behaves in accordance with the Ten Virtuous Karmas in one’s lifetime, one is a good person. The Ten Virtuous Karmas are the most basic standards for good and bad.

The Visualization Sutra teaches the Three Conditions. The first includes being filial to parents, and providing and caring for them; being respectful to and serving teachers; being compassionate and not killing any living beings; and cultivating the Ten Virtuous Karmas. This is the most important foundation for learning Buddhism. When we are filial to our parents, respect our teachers, and are compassionate, then the Ten Virtuous Karmas are fulfilled. Of the Ten Virtuous Karmas, three are physical karmas, four are verbal karmas, and three are mental karmas. The three virtuous physical karmas are no killing, no stealing, and no sexual desire.

The first virtuous physical karma is no killing. The scope of “killing” is very extensive. It includes personally doing the killing; killing verbally (in other words, telling someone to kill); feeling happy when seeing an act of killing; and giving rise to an intention to kill because of anger and hatred. These are all included in “killing.” In other words, no killing means that one has absolutely no thought of harming others. This way we nurture compassion.

The second virtuous physical karma is no stealing. The scope of “stealing” is very extensive. In Buddhism, stealing is defined as taking without permission. If we handle something that is owned by somebody else without their permission, then this is an act of stealing. Those who steal will have to repay the debt in the future.

It is said that one has to repay a life with a life and money with money. The law of cause and effect never fails.

When one steals from one person, the resultant offense is relatively light: the karmic ties are fewer. But, some things are owned by many people, such as the public facilities in a city. If one steals anything from a public facility, one has to pay back all the residents of this city, because they pay taxes and are thus the owners. If one steals from the facilities of a state or federal government, one will have to pay back the whole nation of people.

With stealing, the resultant offense of stealing “property of the Three Jewels” [24] is the most serious—such properties are things belonging to a temple or monastery. The Buddha-dharma is owned by the entire Dharma realm, which has no boundary. In other words, all the monastics are the owners. If one steals something from a cultivation center, the transgression is inconceivably grave. One who steals the property of the Three Jewels will surely fall into the hells realm.

Stealing is the easiest offense to commit and the one most frequently committed. For example, there are some in business who always try to pay less tax. This is stealing. Stealing in this manner is a very grave transgression. One must know that one should feel remorse and then make amends by cultivating goodness.

In the history of Buddhism in China, Great Master Yongming is the one most famous for doing good deeds with the use of public funds, funds he was not authorized to use. Before he became a monastic, he was a low-ranking government clerk in the taxation department. He often used government money to free captured animals. After it was reported that he had taken money, he was sentenced to death, according to the law.

When the emperor heard that he used the public funds solely to free captured animals, he gave these instructions to the official supervising the execution: “If he shows fear before the execution, execute him. But if he does not show the slightest fear, then bring him to me.”

When the clerk was about to be beheaded, he did not show any signs of fear. The supervising official asked him, “Why are you not afraid?” He said, “I exchange my life for tens of thousands of lives. It’s worth it! I am happy!” The official reported this to the emperor. The emperor asked the clerk, “Do you have any wish?” The clerk replied, “I want to become a monastic.” The emperor granted his wish and became his Dharma protector.

After Great Master Yongming attained great enlightenment through Zen meditation, he focused on the Pure Land teachings and concentrated on mindfully chanting the Buddha-name. His biography says that he was Amitabha Buddha manifested.

The master’s stealing is not the same as when we ordinary people do it. Ordinary people steal for personal enjoyment; he stole to benefit all beings. Hence, the Buddha-dharma truly is flexible. It adapts to circumstances, but there is only one objective: to benefit all beings and society. If we steal for our enjoyment, the transgression is inconceivably grave. This example is worthy of our deep contemplation.

The third virtuous physical karma is no sexual desire. Whether one is a lay practitioner or a monastic, sexual desire will increase one's greed and deviated thoughts and obstruct one's pursuit of the supramundane teachings. Therefore, in order to achieve true purity of mind and attain a higher rebirth grade, one must not have sexual desire. If one cannot end sexual desire, one must at least not commit sexual misconduct. The Ten Virtuous Karmas teach no sexual misconduct. This means having no sexual conduct with anyone other than with one's spouse. This is absolutely forbidden.

The four virtuous verbal karmas are no lying, no enticing speech, no harsh speech, and no divisive speech.

The first virtuous verbal karma is no lying. In learning Buddhism, to generate the bodhi mind where should one start? One starts with no lying. If one keeps on lying, how can one's true mind come forth? One must be sincere and not deceive oneself and others. This is the very foundation of the Buddha-dharma.

We want to truly understand the Buddha's intention in laying down the precepts as well as know the spirit of the precepts. This way, we will know how to be flexible in observing the precepts in daily life. This is very important.

Here's an example from a sutra. A hunter was chasing a rabbit and came to a crossing. He saw a person there and asked, "Did you see a rabbit?" "It went that way," the person replied. The rabbit had actually run the other way but the person at the crossing, in order to save the rabbit, told a lie to keep the hunter away from it. His lying was lifting the precept, not transgressing it. What he did saved not only the animal but also the hunter. Although the hunter had intended to kill the rabbit, he did not succeed; so his offense was light.

This tells us that with all precepts, if what we do is to benefit beings, it is lifting the precepts, and if what we do is to benefit only ourselves, then we are transgressing the precepts and are guilty of offenses. When we benefit all beings, we have merit. When we sacrifice ourselves to benefit others, we are bodhisattvas.

The second virtuous verbal karma is no enticing speech. Enticing speech means using inviting words to deceive others or to lure them to commit bad deeds. Today's songs, dance, dramas, movies, novels, and even some literature—known as art nowadays—are full of enticing speech from the viewpoint of Buddhism. They teach people to kill, to steal, and to commit sexual misconduct. The offenses are immensely grave. Let us carefully look at the karmic effects: many famous movies stars come to a bad end. That is their karmic retribution in this lifetime. Their future karmic retributions will be even worse.

I lecture on the Dharma and earnestly urge people to do good deeds, but few people come to listen. Those entertainment shows require entrance fees, and at very high prices too, yet many people attend them. From this we can see that people would rather listen to enticing words than to good advice.

The third virtuous verbal karma is no harsh speech, which is offensive language. It hurts people's dignity.

The fourth virtuous verbal karma is no divisive speech. Divisive speech stirs up trouble, whether one does so intentionally or unintentionally. If one does so intentionally, the offense is grave. If one does so unintentionally, it is a fault, and the outcome determines the gravity of the offense. If one causes discord between two persons or two groups of people, the gravity of the offense depends on the extent of the discord. If one causes two countries to go to war, which results in the loss of many lives and damage to much property, then the offense is immensely grave.

From the above, when one's divisive speech causes extensive damage and the damage lasts a long time, one will fall into the tongue-pulling hell or the Avici hell. Therefore, we must be very careful with our speech.

The three virtuous mental karmas are no greed, no anger, and no ignorance. These are also called the Three Good Roots. All the wholesome dharmas arise from them. Greed, anger, and ignorance are the Three Poison Afflictions, and all the evil dharmas arise from them. Therefore, the three mental karmas are truly the determinant and the root cause of one's suffering and happiness. We must be careful.

People in this world crave fame, prestige, gain, wealth, the Five Desires, and the Six Dusts. If one gets something that one craves, it is because one is destined to have it. If one is not destined to have something, no matter what one does, one will not get it. After reading Liaofan's Four Lessons, we will understand this: if one is destined to have something, one cannot get rid of it no matter what; if one is not destined to have something, one cannot get it no matter what.

Mr. Yuan Liaofan is a good example. The good thing about Liaofan was that he knew his destiny, and knowing his destiny made him content with his lot. Destiny is natural. He accepted his karmic retributions that he was destined to have. Therefore, he did not have any wandering thoughts. His mind was pure.

If everyone understands the law of cause and effect and is content with his or her present life, the world will be at peace. There will be no conflict. When everyone's mind is calm, he or she will truly have happiness in this lifetime. This good fortune can be had by the rich and those in high position. And also by the poor and lowly. Everyone will be happy.

The most frightening thing is that people do not know the existence of destiny or understand the law of cause and effect, nor believe in it. Consequently, people behave as they like and commit wrongdoings every day.

Although one's destiny is predetermined, it changes every day in accordance with one's behavior. So, can one change one's destiny? Yes, one can. If one's behavior every day adds a little to or subtracts a little from good fortune—by one doing small good acts and committing small bad acts—then one's life will be governed by one's destiny, and there will be no change. But if one does major deeds—either good or evil—then one's destiny will be changed.

Therefore, one's destiny after one is forty years old is greatly influenced by one's behavior in this lifetime. One's destiny before one is forty years old is pre-determined, greatly influenced by one's good and evil deeds done in past lifetimes. If one is truly awakened and diligently ends wrongdoings and practices virtuous conduct, one's destiny will change for the better after one is forty years old. This is very important.

Buddhism can help us enjoy good fortune in this lifetime. If we truly believe it and diligently practice, we will become happier and happier in our old age. This depends on our cultivation. The Buddha taught us to practice the Ten Virtuous Karmas. If we practice diligently, worldly good fortune will naturally come to us without our seeking.

The first virtuous mental karma is no greed. In addition to worldly things, one should also not have greed for supramundane teachings. One must completely let go of everything before one's mind can become pure. One should not be attached to what one has or crave for what one does not have. The most important thing is to maintain a pure mind—having is no different from not having.

People often say that one brings nothing with one at birth and one takes nothing with one at death. When we die, we cannot take anything that we own with us. We must clearly understand this truth. Does anything we have now belong to us? No. If we think that what we have belongs to us, this is ignorance! What we have we are just using

temporarily, like when we stay in a hotel. Nothing belongs to us. If we can thoroughly understand this reality, we will not have greed. We will be at ease regardless of what we encounter in life and will not mind or take anything seriously.

When we understand the truth, we will have peace of mind. When we have peace of mind, we will surely see the truth. Therefore, we should let go of everything that is irrelevant—we should absolutely give no rise to greed. We should enthusiastically do more good deeds for all beings and society.

The second virtuous mental karma is no anger. When things do not go as one wishes, one usually gets angry and becomes unhappy. This is very harmful. We often talk about accumulating merits. Merits are like a forest. We cultivate a lot of merits, but when we get angry, the fire of anger will burn away all the merits. This is described as “Fire burns away the forest of merits.”

We should ask ourselves “How much merit do we have?” If we had lost our temper this morning, then we would end up, since that bout of anger, with only a few hours of merits. If we lose our temper at the end of our lives, then we will burn away completely all the merits accumulated in this lifetime.

Anything that causes us to lose our temper is a manifestation of Mara. Mara sees that we have accumulated many merits, and he cannot destroy them—so he induces us to burn our forests of merits.

Hence, when one who truly has wisdom and is awakened faces an adverse situation, this person will absolutely not burn away his or her merits, will absolutely not lose his or her temper. [To achieve this,] this person must practice patience.

When we have patience, we will have meditative concentration. When we have meditative concentration, we will have wisdom. Of the Six Paramitas, giving and precept observation allow us to cultivate merits. Patience allows us to preserve merits. If one cannot practice patience, one will destroy one’s own merits.

Merits are precept observation, meditative concentration, and wisdom. When one loses one’s temper, one will not have any precept observation, meditative concentration, and wisdom.

If one cultivates good fortune but loses one’s temper often, harbors hatred and jealousy, is arrogant, or loves to outdo others, one will have no merits but will still have great good fortune. This is because good fortune cannot be burned away. Which path will this kind of people be reborn in? The Buddha said that they will be reborn in the path of asuras. Asuras have good fortune but no virtues. They are prone to anger and lose their tempers easily, and hurt others. But when they use up their good fortune, they will fall into a bad realm. Buddhism often talks about “anger and resentment in the third lifetime”—one cultivates good fortune in the first lifetime, enjoys it in the second lifetime, and falls into a bad realm in the third lifetime.

We must know that our anger harms us more than others: it harms us 70 percent and others 30 percent.

The third virtuous mental karma is no ignorance. Ignorance means no wisdom. There are many smart people, eloquent in debate or skillful at talking or writing, but they do not have wisdom. What is wisdom? The ability to truly differentiate between true and false, proper and deviated, right and wrong, and beneficial and harmful.

If an old village lady, one who has never received any formal education and is illiterate, when told to mindfully chant “Amitufo” does so sincerely during the remainder of her lifetime, then she has true wisdom. Why? Because she chooses to mindfully chant “Amitufo” to seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land, which is true, not

false; proper, not deviated; beneficial, not harmful; and good, not bad. Her choice is correct in every aspect. This is true wisdom!

Many intelligent people in this world doubt the Buddha-name chanting method. They even slander it. This act is totally without wisdom. This is ignorance! They do not get any benefit. Moreover, they obstruct others from learning and practicing this method, even to the point of causing them to stop their practice. This offense is very grave, and the future karmic retributions are unthinkable.

No greed, no anger, and no ignorance—these are the roots of all wholesome dharmas in the world. If one cultivates virtuousness from the root, then one is an intelligent person.

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[24] “Property of the Three Jewels” is a Buddhist terminology that refers to the property of a temple or monastery. The statue of a Buddha, the worship hall, flowers, canopies—these are the property of the Buddha Jewel. Sutras, stationery, containers and linens for protecting sutras—these are the property of the Dharma Jewel. Dormitories and farms of monasteries; clothing, alms bowls, and other personal items belonging to monastics—these are property of the Sangha Jewel. The items for each Jewel must only be used for that Jewel and not otherwise. For example, the flowers in the chanting hall should not be used as a personal item.—Practical Buddhist Dictionary “Shi Yong Fo Xue Ci Dian” compiled by Gao Guan Lu, 1934 (Buddhist Book Store, China).

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