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Essence of the Infinite Life Sutra - Venerable Master Chin Kung



EXCERPT FORTY

[All of you] can rectify your minds, correct your thoughts, and refrain from committing evil deeds in this world. This is quite a great merit.

“Rectify your minds, correct your thoughts” refers to generating the bodhi mind. Simply put, rectifying one’s mind means not thinking, not seeing, and not hearing anything that is not reasonable or that does not accord with the Buddha’s teaching. This is cultivating an upright and sincere mind.

“Evil deeds” refers to anything that does not benefit all beings.

Presently, the world is an evil world of the Five Corruptions.^[35] In particular, the tools used to spread news and views are overwhelming. Those who commit evil deeds are many and those who cultivate virtuous deeds are few.

Those who know and accept the Buddha’s teaching should rectify their minds, correct their thoughts, and refrain from committing evil deeds in this chaotic world. If one “refrains from committing evil deeds,” and cultivates the Ten Virtuous Karmas, this is great merit. One is accumulating merits and virtues.

[35] The corruption of the age, the corruption of views, the corruption of afflictions, the corruption of sentient beings, and the corruption of life.—Trans.

EXCERPT FORTY ONE

Buddha . . . teach all beings to . . . discard the Five Evils, leave the Five Sufferings, stay away from the Five Burnings, subdue and transform their thoughts, and observe the Five Goodnesses so as to obtain the good fortune from this.[36]

The Buddha taught all beings to end wrongdoings and practice goodness so that they can receive true good fortune.

In “discard the Five Evils,” the “Five Evils” are killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants. These are causes.

The first evil is killing, which will bring about the retributions of illness and a short life span. No killing and a vegetarian diet will bring about the rewards of good health and a long life.

The second evil is stealing. Its retribution is poverty. If we want to be wealthy and keep our wealth forever and not lose it, we need to know how to cultivate the cause. Those who constantly think of stealing from others will not keep their wealth for long. Those who are happy to give will most certainly obtain great wealth.

The third evil is sexual misconduct. Everyone wants to have a prosperous and happy family. To achieve this, one must definitely not commit sexual misconduct.

The fourth evil is lying. In the world at large, when one does not lie and keeps one’s word, one will win the trust, respect, and support of others. One’s career will be smooth.

The fifth evil is taking intoxicants, which will confuse one’s mind. When one is intoxicated, one cannot control one’s speech or behavior and thus will very often commit offenses that result in grave mistakes.

The Buddha taught us to end these Five Evils and cultivate the Five Goodnesses, which are the Five Precepts of no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, and no taking intoxicants. These five precepts should be adhered to from the time we begin to generate the mind to learn Buddhism until the time we attain the level of bodhisattva. When we seek rebirth into the Pure Land by Buddha-name chanting, if we cannot fulfill these five precepts, then no matter how many times we chant the Buddha-name we will not be able to attain rebirth.

The Western Pure Land is a place where the beings of superior goodness gather. If we cannot end the Five Evils and cultivate the Five Goodnesses, we will be incompatible with the Pure Land. We must accord with virtuousness so as to have Amitabha Buddha come to escort us to his land.

In “leave the Five Sufferings, stay away from the Five Burnings,” “Five Sufferings” are flower retributions[37] and “Five Burnings” are fruit retributions.[38] When there are causes, there will surely be effects. Committing the [above] five evil causes will bring about the retributions of suffering. “Sufferings” refers to the sufferings in life. “Burnings” refers to the future sufferings in the Three Evil Paths.

From this we can see that when one commits evil karmas, one will suffer not only now but also in the future, where the retributions will be even more terrible.

“Thoughts” in “subdue and transform thoughts” refers to wandering thoughts, greed, anger, ignorance, and arrogance. “Transform” means transforming afflictions into Bodhi and transforming killing into compassion. This is the goal of the Buddha in teaching people.

How does one subdue and transform one's thoughts? When an evil thought arises, one should instantly have the wisdom to be aware of it and stop the wandering thought. For many kalpas, for which there is no beginning, ordinary beings have been immersed in affliction and habits, so they naturally have many wandering thoughts. But as it is said, "Do not fear a thought arising; fear realizing it too late." When an evil thought arises, one should immediately detect it and transform it into "Amitufo." This is cultivation. In the Zen school, this is the practice of enlightening illumination. Here is where we practice: transforming an evil thought into a virtuous thought, transforming an evil thought into "Amitufo." The thought of "Amitufo" is the most virtuous. There is no thought more virtuous than this.

"Observe the Five Goodnesses so as to obtain the good fortune from this." The Five Goodnesses are the Five Precepts. We should abide by the Five Precepts. In addition to not killing, we should maintain a vegetarian diet because it is healthy.

There are many strange illnesses nowadays. How do they come about? Medical and scientific studies have come up with some theories that seem correct but are actually wrong. The true cause is eating meat.

A proverb says, "Illness enters through the mouth; trouble exits from it." Meat is undoubtedly poisonous. Great Master Yinguang once told a story. A woman breastfed her children. The first one died, so did the second one. Subsequently, the milk was sent to a lab for testing. It was found that she had fed the children when she was angry. Her anger generated a poisonous substance that made the milk poisonous. She thus poisoned her own children.

From this we can deduce that when any living being is being killed, it is not everyday anger that the being feels but something more intense—hatred. Therefore, all meat is poisonous and eating meat is the same as taking poison. One may not get ill immediately, but over a long time this will bring about strange illnesses. A vegetarian diet will surely bring about good health and longevity.

"No killing" will bring about longevity. "No stealing" will bring about great wealth. "No sexual misconduct" will bring about a dignified appearance. "No lying" will bring about people's respect. "No intoxicants" is a wise thing as one will maintain a clear head.

Cultivating the Five Goodnesses will naturally bring about good fortune, longevity, good health, and wealth. Everything will go well in one's family and in one's career. This is what one will get now. Future rewards will be even more wondrous.

[36] This paragraph in the sutra begins with "Now I become a Buddha here to teach and transform all beings to discard the Five Evils, leave the Five Sufferings . . ."—Trans.

[37] Retributions received in the present lifetime.—Trans.

[38] Retributions to be received in future lifetimes.—Trans.

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