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July 26, 2013

## Liao-Fan's Four Lessons

### THE SECOND LESSON:

#### WAYS TO REFORM

A Determined and Courageous Heart:

From Courage Comes Inspiration

The third way to reform is that one must have “a determined and courageous heart”.

We need to be brave in regretting and reforming. The first way talked about how being ashamed is close to being brave. Being ashamed is being awakened. Not being ashamed is being deluded. Therefore, being ashamed is a condition for awakening. Being courageous is a condition for its effort and accomplishment. Being ashamed is to awaken from within, for the mind to be truly awakened. Having a fearful heart is the external force that helps us to refrain from doing anything bad, which also reflects the extreme deep shame in our self-nature. Shame is the state of mind of being ashamed. Fear is the state of mind of being conscience-stricken. To feel ashamed and to be conscience-stricken are two virtuous states of mind.

There are eleven virtuous Dharmas in the Sastra on the Door to Understanding the Hundred Dharmas, one of which includes shame. If we can feel ashamed, then we are bound to achieve. Throughout his life, Master Yin-Guang said that he was “constantly shameful”, that is, he would constantly bear in mind a shameful and fearful heart. He cultivated with this frame of mind, thus he was able to be diligent and brave in improving himself. In this way, he truly achieved in having a determined and courageous heart.

When we hesitate to reform our faults because we really do not want to change, we are content with what we can get away with. For a reform to take place, we must use all of our efforts and resolve to change immediately. We should not doubt or postpone our resolve to change until tomorrow or the day after.

More often than not, we are drifting along day to day. Please be aware that if we are not advancing, we are regressing. We do not seek progress. We especially do not have the heart to keep progressing in our virtuous conduct. Today, people are also brave and diligent in trying to advance, but what they seek are the Five Desires, the Six Dusts and the Five Poisons. They do not know to fear the consequences. The sages of this world and beyond taught us to keep progressing in our morality, ethics and wisdom for they are higher than just academic attainment. The learning of ethics and morality is different from academic attainment. Learning is the wisdom that flows from our true nature, what Buddhists call our original, innate wisdom.

On the other hand, academic skills and learning are called worldly intelligence. Today, we advance bravely and diligently, but we are going in the wrong direction. We are going into the Six Realms of Reincarnation, into the Three Bad Realms. The sages of this world and beyond teach us that we need to transcend the Six Realms, to free ourselves forever from reincarnation, to catch up with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Therefore, as Mr. Liao-Fan said, to reform, we must use all of our efforts and resolve to change immediately. We should neither

doubt nor wait to reform, nor postpone our resolve to change until sometime in the future. Once we have realized this, we must do all that we can to lift our spirits and diligently advance. We need to do it now, without any doubt, delay, hesitation. There is no need to wait any longer, say it and do it now.

A minor fault is like a thorn piercing our flesh. It should be quickly removed.

When we have a thorn piercing our skin, it is very painful. We will do whatever we can to quickly extract it. But to bear a minor fault in our mind is even more painful. We need to become aware of it, for if we are not, it is as if we have no sense of feeling. As if we do not know that we have pain when something is piercing our body. Now, it is not our flesh that is unfeeling, it is our conscience.

A big fault is like a finger bitten by a poisonous snake. We must cut off that finger without hesitation to prevent the poison from spreading and taking our life. In I Ching, the Book of Changes, when we get the symbol of wind and thunder, it tells us that we have strong determination in reforming and are certain to succeed in doing so.

This is just an example to show us how determined we need to be to end all incorrect ways. When we are lethargic and listless every day, it is due to our karmic obstacles emerging. When we have numerous wandering thoughts, afflictions, worries, and find that nothing is going as we wish, it is due to our karmic obstacles emerging.

In Buddhism, we often speak of karmic obstacles. What are they? They arise when we have nightmares at night. They arise when we do not have a regular pattern in our daily living habits. When this happens, we need to earnestly reflect, to be vigilant! If we are able to correct all our faults, then our karmic obstacles will be eradicated.

When we have fewer karmic obstacles, we will be filled with the Dharma joy. We will feel light in body and mind, without any burdens. To have fewer karmic obstacles means to have fewer afflictions. With fewer afflictions, our mind will naturally be pure and constantly give rise to wisdom. With wisdom, we will see and understand very clearly everything around us, whether affecting body or mind, whether regarding Buddhism or worldly matters. We need to have the determination, need to want to be able to examine our motives and feelings, to find our faults and courageously correct them. In no way should we be afraid of doing this.

I Ching, the Book of Changes contains sixty-four combinations, each combination has six explanations or predictions. The wind-thunder symbol represents benefit and is concerned with resolution and determination. If we are able to make the resolution and have the determination to correct our erroneous ways and to cultivate kindness, we need to do so for only then are we able to receive true benefits. If we can immediately reform without hesitation, then we have done as the wind-thunder symbol said we would.

If we can follow the three ways of shame, fear and determination to reform, then our personality will surely be transformed.

In reforming ourselves, we need to have these three hearts of shame, fear and courageous determination. To have a shameful heart is self-awakening. To have a respectful and fearful heart is to be conscience-stricken. Only when we have both of these do we give rise to a courageous and determined heart. To regret and reform ourselves. So knowing this, why are we unable to correct our faults? We do not yet possess a shameful and fearful heart. We have thus, not generated the motivation to give rise to a courageous and determined heart. The courageous and determined heart arises from the shameful and fearful heart. If we do not know shame, then we are not afraid of being laughed at by others so there is no incentive for us to cultivate kindness.

How do we nurture these three hearts? Of all sutras, why do we choose the Infinite Life Sutra for everyone to practice? It is not that the rest of the sutras are not good, they just do not explain as perfectly as does the Infinite Life Sutra. It completely explains the matters, principles, causes and effects. It is not too lengthy so it is easy for modern people to practice and it is the essence of all sutras!

Our Morning and Evening Ceremony Recitation Book is especially compiled for fellow practitioners at the Amitabha Buddhist Societies. Ancient virtuous people originally edited the older version of the recitation book. So, their version was designed to cure the problems of the practitioners of that time. Thus it was, as expected, effective for them. However, our problems differ from theirs, thus we need to modify the morning and evening recitations. For the morning ceremony, we recite chapter six of the Infinite Life Sutra, in the hope of having the same mind and vow as that of Buddha Amitabha.

For the evening ceremony, we recite chapters thirty-two through thirty-seven. These six chapters explain the five offenses of killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, lying and consuming intoxicants. The essence of these six chapters consists of the Five Fundamental Precepts and the Ten Bad Conducts. They are causes. These chapters also talk of the Five Sufferings, which are the current sufferings we undergo and the Five Burnings, which include the retributions we bear after our current life, the consequences we undergo in the hells. As we recite these daily, they can help us to reflect, regret and reform. Reciting these six chapters is essentially the same as reciting the repentance verse. After reading it, we need to be vigilant, to be awakened, to sincerely mend our ways and to follow their guidance in understanding and cultivation. This way we will gain benefit from this kind of recitation practice. Therefore, it is important for us to have these three kinds of hearts.

Just as the sun's rays shine on a thin layer of ice in the springtime, there is no need to worry about its melting.

If we have these three hearts, we will immediately reform our faults. It is just like the ice in springtime. As the weather grows warmer, the ice grows thinner. When the sun comes out, the ice melts. It is the same with our wisdom. As it grows, our karmic obstacles melt away.

### Three Methods of Practice to Reforming

#### Changing Through Behavior

There are also three methods of practice to help us reform. First is changing through behavior, second is changing through reasoning and third is changing from the heart. Since the degree of achievement varies, so do the results. For example, if I killed living beings in the past, I now vow not to kill again starting today. If I was angry and yelled at others in the past, I vow not to get angry starting today. This is how a person changes through behavior and refrains from repeating a wrongdoing by vowing not to do it again.

The commentary stated, "generating a shameful, fearful and determined heart as the cause of regretting and reforming, shows us the three paths of behavior, reasoning and heart. This details the methods of practice in reforming." Previously Mr. Liao-Fan spoke of principles. Now he tells us of the methods of practice. In total, there are three general kinds of methods. First, let us talk about "changing through behavior".

When we are angry, we lose our temper and yell at others. This encroaches upon using abusive language. We can change through our behavior and refrain from repeating a wrongdoing by vowing not to do it again. This is to totally change through behavior, to find each and every fault and reform them. At first, Mr. Liao-Fan also changed through behavior. We see him accomplishing his three thousand good deeds over ten years. Taking this long to

accomplish this amount of good deeds is not that outstanding. The second time he took only four years to accomplish the next three thousand good deeds, when he sought and attained a son. But the time spent was still fairly long. Truthfully speaking, the result attained was as sought, to change through behavior.

In Buddhism, to change through behavior is to abide by the precepts. There are eight schools in Mahayana Buddhism and two in Theravada Buddhism. However, both start their cultivation from “abiding by the precepts”, in other words, cultivation through behavior. This is especially true for the Theravada precepts which emphasize behavior not the intention or thought.

This is different from the Mahayana precepts like those in the Brahma Net Sutra. This particular sutra was not completely translated into Chinese. It is a somewhat lengthy sutra of which only the most important chapter, the “Mind Precept Chapter”, which is comprised of two scrolls, was brought to China. The first explains the state of mind of a Bodhisattva. The second explains the Bodhisattva precepts and behavior. Truthfully speaking, what is important is the state of the mind. The first section emphasizes changing from the mind, to reform. The latter section emphasizes changing through behavior. Naturally, to change from the mind as well as through behavior would be the best way to reform ourselves.

However, it is a hundred times harder if we force ourselves not to do something than if we just stopped doing it naturally. If we do not uproot our faults, but merely suppress them, the faults will eventually resurface even if we have temporarily stopped committing them. Therefore, the method of changing through behavior cannot help us to permanently rid ourselves of our faults.

The root of our problems lies in our minds. If we only suppress our faults instead of eliminating them, they will simply reappear at another time even if we have temporarily stopped committing them. Therefore, the method of changing through behavior is not permanent. It is not the best way for it only treats the symptom. It is treating the head when there is a headache, treating the foot when there is a foot pain. This leaves the root problem intact, not uprooted and eradicated. In other words, the behavior may seem all right but the mind is polluted. The outside seems all right but within is not.

**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/>

## **Boston Amita Buddhism Society Activities**

**8/4/2013 2:00PM-7:00PM on Samuel Clemens at Boston Harbor  
Masters give a lecture of “Taking Birth in Pure Land by Ten Recitations” and host a  
ceremony to relieve live sea animals.**

**Group Buddha Recitation Every Saturday and Sunday**

**For details please call ABS (508)580-4349 or email to [amtb.ma@gmail.com](mailto:amtb.ma@gmail.com)**