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

Tel : 857-998-0169

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Essence of the Infinite Life Sutra - Venerable Master Chin Kung



EXCERPT FORTY THREE

People in this world do not follow laws and rules. They are extravagant, indulge excessively in desires, and are arrogant—they willfully do whatever they want. Those who hold high positions are corrupted; they are not upright in their duties. They falsely incriminate others and harm loyal and upright people. What they think is contrary to what they say; they are scheming and deceitful. They will try to deceive all—regardless of whether others have high or low positions, regardless of whether they are related or not. They get angry and are ignorant—they want to gain the riches of others. They desire more, and compete for advantage and profit. Grudges form and turn into enmities, causing families to be ruined and members to separate or die. They do not care about before and after. Some rich people are stingy and unwilling to give. Imprisoned by their desires, their greed runs deep. Their minds labor and their bodies suffer. They continue like this until the very end, yet nothing will accompany them. What will follow them into their next life will be their good karmas, bad karmas, good fortune, and misfortune. They may go to happy places or to extremely miserable places. When seeing the virtuousness of others, they become hateful and slanderous, instead of having respect and admiration. They constantly harbor the intent to steal, hoping to appropriate the wealth of others for their own. After they use it up, they try to take more again. Spiritual beings of heaven and earth will record their deeds and eventually they will fall into the evil paths.

“People in this world do not follow laws and rules.” “Rules” are regulations, etiquette, customs, and moral values. When people do not obey laws or follow etiquette, society will be in chaos. The following describes the chaotic phenomena of society.

“They are extravagant, indulge excessively in desires, and are arrogant—they willfully do whatever they want.” “Willfully doing whatever they want” means that they do whatever they like without restraint.

“Those who hold high positions are corrupted; they are not upright in their duties.” “Those who hold high positions” refers to people who have leadership roles in society. “Corrupted” means not understanding the principles. “Not upright” refers to improper thoughts and behavior—for selfish gains, the public is harmed. This refers to the government officials who take bribes and abuse the law. Their intentions are not upright. They do not work for the benefit of the people. Instead, they benefit themselves by thinking of all kinds of ways to cheat people of their hard work and possessions. Such stealing is very grave.

The following are examples.

“They falsely incriminate others and harm loyal and upright people.” This is to forcibly take the power, position, or wealth of others. This is having the mind of stealing.

“What they think is contrary to what they say; they are scheming and deceitful.” This is saying that what these people say and do are different. They scheme to defraud others. Things like this have happened throughout history and around the world. No matter how wise and able a leader is, it is unavoidable for him or her to wrong a few innocent people or to make mistakes that are bad for citizens. Throughout history, in this world, we cannot find a person who is perfect, one who has never made a mistake in his or her lifetime.

“They will try to deceive all—regardless of high or low position, regardless of whether they are related or not.” “High” refers to one’s elders. “Low” refers to one’s juniors. “Related or not” refers to relatives and non-relatives. To benefit themselves, they deceive all: elders, juniors, family, and outsiders. Families are in discord—with parents, children, siblings, relatives, and friends all trying to deceive one another.

“They get angry and are ignorant—they want to gain the riches of others. They desire more, and compete for advantage and profit.” This is brought about by greed for wealth and benefit. Always wanting to get more for ourselves and not wanting to yield, we quarrel with others and others with us, and we become foes.

“Grudges form and turn into enmity, causing families to be ruined and members to separate or die. They do not care about before and after.” “Before” refers to cause and “after” refers to retribution. People do not know about cause and effect, which is why they are not afraid to do as they please. When retributions appear, it is too late for regret. The result is their families are destroyed and they lose their own lives.

“Some rich people are stingy and unwilling to give.” This is describing the rich and prestigious people who are greedy and stingy, and who are unwilling to help others.

People in this world do not understand the truth of life and the universe. They are ignorant and selfish. The Buddha told us the truth of life and the universe—the entire Dharma Realm is one entity, and the true nature of Buddhas and bodhisattvas and that of all beings are one. From this, we realize that we and all the other beings in the entire Dharma Realm are closely knit—when we love ourselves, we will love all beings; when we help others, we are helping ourselves.

Buddhist practitioners must broaden their minds and care about all beings. The broader the mind, the greater the good fortune. In this world and beyond, the Buddha's good fortune is the greatest good fortune because his mind "embraces the expanse of space and encompasses the vastness of the universe."

Wealth is good fortune, and it will be used up some day. It is stated in the sutras that one's wealth belongs to five families. The first is water, which can flood one's properties. The second is fire, which can burn one's properties. The third is the government. In the past, the government would confiscate all the properties of a criminal. The fourth is robbers and thieves. The fifth is spendthrift children, who are hard to guard against.

How does one protect one's wealth? By giving. One should try to do more charitable acts that benefit society and all beings.

During the Spring and Autumn period in China, Mr. Fan Li was a senior official of King Gou Jian of the Yue state. After the Yue state was conquered by the Wu state, he helped Gou Jian restore the Yue state. When he completed his mission, he changed his name and started to do business. Within a few years, he amassed a great fortune. After he became wealthy, he gave away all his wealth and again started a small business. Within a few years, he amassed another great fortune. He then gave away all his wealth a second time. In his lifetime, he amassed great wealth three times and gave everything away three times. He was truly wise and able. What he did was very correct.

When we have enough food and clothing, we should take care of the poor and work for the benefit of society and the local community. We must know to practice virtuous conduct, cultivate good fortune, and accumulate merit. The more wealth we give away, the more we will receive. When we give, we will gain. When we do not give, we will not gain.

"Imprisoned by their desires, their greed runs deep. Their minds labor and their bodies suffer." When one has a lot of money, one worries about gains and losses. One will not be at ease. Therefore, one suffers physically and mentally.

"They continue like this until the very end, yet nothing will accompany them." An ancient eminent master said, "[When we die,] we cannot take anything with us; only karmas will accompany us." Fame and honor, wealth and rank, and money and possessions—we cannot take these with us. All the good karmas and bad karmas created in our lifetime will stay with us. Those who are truly awakened know that they should cultivate what they can take with them. What they cannot take along, they should just ignore and waste no energy on.

"What will follow them into their next life will be their good karmas, bad karmas, good fortune, and misfortune." Good karmas will bring about good fortune. Bad karmas will bring about misfortune.

"They may go to happy places or go into extremely miserable places." "Happy places" refers to the human and heavenly paths. "Extremely miserable places" refers to the Three Evil Paths (of hells, hungry ghosts, and animals). It is our own good and bad karmas that dictate and pull us into the path that we are reborn in. This is retribution, not the work of Lord Yama, God, Buddhas, or bodhisattvas.

"When seeing the virtuousness of others, they become hateful and slanderous, instead of wanting to emulate them." Such thinking and behavior is not virtuous. Jealousy and hatred are indeed thoughts of stealing. Why? Because one does not like to see others doing better. This mindset is not normal. Wishing that others be worse

off or becoming displeased, critical or slanderous when seeing virtuous people or good deeds being done—these are all thoughts of stealing.

A virtuous person delights upon seeing other virtuous people or good deeds and will wholeheartedly assist these people and help them accomplish their good deeds. A virtuous person sets a good example for whatever community he is in, and his good deeds will definitely benefit the general public.

When we help others achieve their goals, we will succeed in our cultivation of virtues. When we obstruct others, we are committing tremendously grave offenses.

“They constantly harbor the intent to steal, hoping to appropriate the wealth of others for their own. After they use it up, they try to take more again.” These people use various illegal means to take the gains of others and use them for their own enjoyment. When they use up the ill-gotten gains, they will again think of other ways to get more. This is stealing—having both the intent and the action.

“Spiritual beings of heaven and earth will record their deeds and eventually they will fall into the evil paths.” “Spiritual beings” refers to heavenly and earthly spirits. When one gives rise to an evil mind and commits evil deeds, one may fool others but not the spiritual beings. They keep a record of what one does. This is the first sense of this sentence.

“Spiritual beings” also refers to one’s consciousness, which the Chinese call conscience. Others may not know the evil deeds that one commits, but one clearly knows it in one’s heart. The seeds of these deeds will be embedded in the Alaya Consciousness and will not vanish. When the conditions mature, one will suffer retributions. This is the second sense of the sentence.

Our every thought and every action are recorded, like the data in a computer. Our Alaya Consciousness records all our good and evil thoughts and actions, similar to what a computer does. This is our database, containing not only data in this lifetime but also data from all past lifetimes. Spiritual beings and people who have the ability can read our data.

Therefore, we should be cautious with our thoughts. We should not allow any evil thought to arise. Every thought should be of benefiting all beings and not be of harming them. This way, we will truly succeed in attaining great virtue.

“Eventually they will fall into the evil paths.” This talks about retribution. Ultimately, these people will fall into the evil paths.

If the Buddha does not tell us these truths, there is no one else who can clearly explain them to us. This is how the Buddha helps and protects us: he teaches us to be constantly alert to our thoughts, words, and actions, so that we will not have any evil thought or commit any evil deed. This is leaving suffering behind and attaining happiness.

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