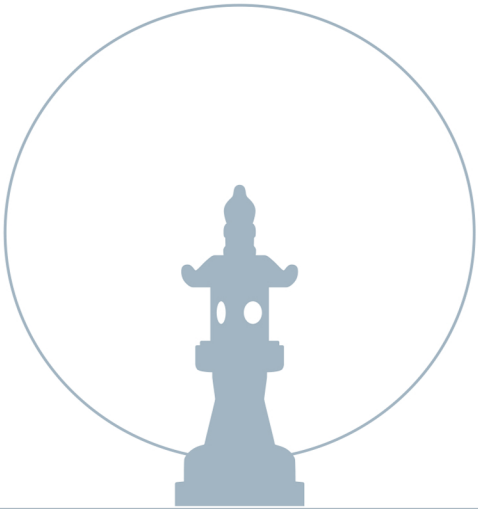
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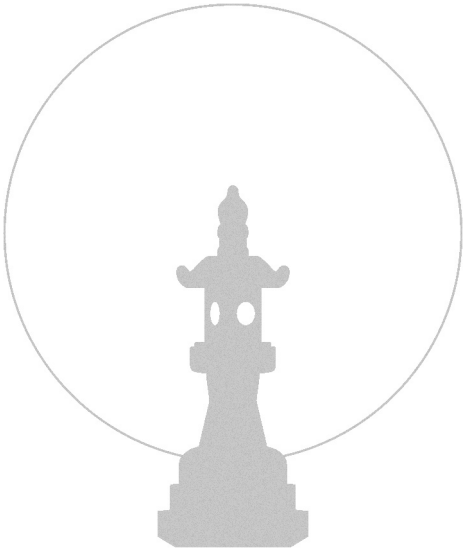
生命也是可以被设计的

Life Can Also Be Designed



济群法师 著
Master Jiqun

大千出版社



【静心学堂丛书】

文化篇

人生篇

社会篇

信仰篇

实践篇



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2025年秋为母爱书院开示

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现在是一个浮躁的时代。工业革命后的两百多年来，人们向外追求，构建以物质积累和技术进步为中心的生活。随着 AI 时代的全面来临，科技正以指数级的速度发展，但人类的生命状态并未得到相应提升。正相反，在技术繁荣的表象下，是越来越多的失衡、困顿，越来越普遍的焦虑、迷茫。

曾经，机器取代了大量简单劳动，给人类生活带来极大便利。到今天，更多工作将被 AI 取代，包括写作、设计等脑力劳动。对很多人来说，工作是实现价值、出人头地、证明自己、打发时间的重要支点。当这些不再是独属于人类的能力时，活着的价值是什么？未来的出路在哪里？

2018 年，我和哲学家周国平围绕《人工智能时代，人类何去何从》展开对话。其中谈到，人类唯有向内探寻，认识并提升自己，从生命自身寻找价值，让自己变得更美好，才能找到安身立命的所在。无论 AI 如何发展，人的问题还是要自己解决。即使吃饭、睡觉、排泄这些最简单的事，AI 都无法替代，何况调整心态、开启智慧、培养道德、健全人格，更是 AI 无能为力的。

一百多年前，尼采提出“上帝已死，需要重新估量价值”，我们现在正面临同样的问题。在生活相对稳定的过去，我们往往会把拥有当作存在，觉得我有事业、有名望、有财富，就等于什么样的人，关注的是“拥有什么”，却忽略了“我是什么”。但在充满不确定的今天，已经很难预见，当下拥有的一切还能维持多久，何时就会失去。在贫穷年代，人们以为有了钱就能实现价值，过得幸福。当越来越多人有钱之后，却发现，有钱和幸福是两个概念。所以，拥有只是人生的外延，内核在于“我是什么”。

有哈佛学者谈及，当前校内最活跃的学术动向，

一是人工智能，一是疗愈文化，包括身心健康到生死归宿。后者直指人生的根本课题，也是东方智慧，尤其是中国儒释道传统擅长的。其核心在于安身立命，引导我们认识自我，解决身心问题，造就美好人格。这种关注整体生命成长的智慧，是当今世界特别需要的。

一、教育是为了育人

作为中国人
应该具备两方面的内涵
一是生理层面的血统
即我们代代相续的黄皮肤、黑头发
一是精神层面的文化道统
是由文化传承造就的
人格、心态、价值观及处世方式

在座各位来自母爱书院，从事教育。现在的学校教育主要是传授知识，大家都在关注考什么大学，学什么专业，充满功利性的排名、竞争。这种单一的评价体系，又带来种种压力和心理问题，从老师到学生都苦不堪言。事实上，老师的职责是教书育人，要以育人为核心，引导学生健康成长，而不仅仅是教书，也不仅仅是考虑就业、生存。

作为中国人，应该具备两方面的内涵。一是生理层面的血统，即我们代代相续的黄皮肤、黑头发；一是精神层面的文化道统，是由文化传承造就的人格、心态、价值观及处世方式。儒家的学以成人，佛法的明心见性，道家的返璞归真，都是以修身为本，立足

于生命自身的完善。在这个前提下，才能进一步齐家、治国、平天下。在王维、刘禹锡、白居易、苏轼、王安石等文人士大夫身上，儒释道思想高度融合。他们秉持儒家精神，积极入世，服务社会；同时又汲取佛法智慧，以此安顿身心，超然物外，形成了“以出世心行入世事”的圆融境界。这种兼具慈悲与智慧的思想体系，是当代人特别需要的。

在海外，不少华人父母担心孩子从小接受西方教育，成为“香蕉人”，皮肤是黄的，内里却是白的，因此很关注对传统文化的学习。相比之下，国内的人反而不太有这种意识。这是需要调整的。因为血统只是物质构成，道统才是精神所在。如果缺乏这些内涵，甚至不能算作完整的中国人。

我曾为企业界做过很多讲座，后结集为《经营企业与经营人生》。在和企业家接触的过程中发现，很多人把经营企业当作经营人生，把企业的成功当作人生的成功，把企业的规模、利润等同于个人价值。最后虽然把企业做得不错，却未必过得幸福，甚至会因长期的操劳和压力，带来种种身心问题。所以，做人

才是持续滋养生命的根本，做事只是实现人生价值的途径之一，并不是全部。

说到做人，我们首先会想到道德，比如《论语》的仁义礼智信、温良恭俭让。有些人觉得，道德是社会要求，如果别人不讲，只有自己遵守，不会吃亏吗？之所以有这些想法，是只见一时一事的得失。其实，道德是安身立命的根基，直接关系到我们怎么活着。古人讲的“美人”，不是指长相，而是德行好、内心美，能够仁者爱人、守持诚信、言行有度。这样的人，走到哪儿都会给人带来美好的感觉。即使不能马上兑现物质利益，也一定能带来长远的综合收获。所以讲道德是一种生命智慧，知道怎么做人，怎么活好这一生。

二、人生最重要的设计

怎么才能设计生命
一是有智慧
知道生命到底怎么回事
自己想要什么样的生命品质
二是有方法
知道怎么把设计方案落地
否则，设计得再好也是枉然

生活中，从日常穿搭、家居用品，到城市建筑、公共空间，都离不开设计。但这些设计是外在的，和我们只有暂时的关系。即使设计得再出色，能不能代表你就很美好，很幸福？显然不能。最重要的，是对生命本身的设计，知道选择什么，培养什么，造就什么。这才是和我们关系最密切的。

我在讲座中经常说：你是什么，比拥有什么更重要。物质文明的发展，使人把目光转向拥有，甚至把拥有当作存在，本末倒置。如果忽略存在，即使拥有再多，也不会给生命品质加分。反而会使人为物所累，不堪重负。这是现代社会的普遍现象。

怎么才能设计生命？一是有智慧，知道生命到底

怎么回事，自己想要什么样的生命品质。就像设计产品，必须具备相关知识，了解用户需求，才能做出合理设计。二是有方法，知道怎么把设计方案落地。否则，设计得再好也是枉然。有句话叫作“江山易改，秉性难移”，说明改变生命是极其困难的。因为多数人并不了解自己，只是稀里糊涂地活着，从未想过，还可以设计生命，造就美好的自己。

而这正是中国传统文化擅长的，包括儒家的道德观，佛法的生命智慧和禅修实践，三者缺一不可。没有道德，不愿改变自己，一切无从谈起；没有智慧，看不清自己，不知如何改变；没有禅修，缺乏调心之道，无力加以改变。

1. 人生问题

设计生命，首先要了解自身现状。佛法有个概念叫无明，即没有光明。佛法认为，每个生命内在都有一盏智慧明灯，当这盏灯没被点亮时，内心一片漆黑，什么都看不清。世间之所以有宗教、哲学，就是因为

我们对人生和世界充满困惑，所以要上下求索，寻找答案。以下这些追问，就是人们几千年来孜孜以求的，哲学称之为终极问题。

其一，我从哪里来？可能有人会说：是因为父母生下了我。其实，父母给予的只是物质部分。在这个身体被生下之前，“我”在哪里？

其二，我往哪里去？也是一个重大问题。中国人忌讳死，平时不愿谈论、面对。死之将至时，往往焦虑、恐惧，最后在不甘、不舍、不知所措中无奈离去。我最近在关注安宁疗护的课题，当疾病不再有治疗意义时，怎么才能安详地走完最后一程，是我们需要思考的。古人以五福临门为圆满人生，其中就有善终。但在今天，真正善终的人很少。更多的，是在各种抢救中备受折磨，死得毫无质量。

其三，我是谁？选佛场内有块匾额，叫“本来面目”，就在提醒我们：究竟什么代表“我”。很多人把身体、相貌当作我，或是把事业、地位、荣誉当作我。但这些只是暂时属于我，并非真正的自己。由此构成的“假我”，需要各种事物的不断支持，才能维

系。因为把安全感建立于外在，就会希望事业千秋万代，地位天长地久。但我们面对的现实世界，却充满了无常变化。尤其是现在，变化正以前所未有的速度发生。这种不确定，冲击着我们对永恒的期待，使很多人焦虑、痛苦、没有安全感。学佛就是让我们看清，究竟什么代表“我”？在一念未生前，什么是“本来面目”？明白这一点，才能在变化的世界，找到不变的定位。

其四，世界的真相是什么？现代科学发现，宇宙中，我们能看到的部分只有 4%，还有 96% 的暗物质、暗能量是看不到的。从佛法角度说，因为受制于认知系统，人类的所知所见极其有限。我们总以为，自己亲眼看到的，一定是实实在在的，怎么可能不真实、不客观呢？不知你们有没有戴过 VR 眼镜？当戴上 VR 时，虚拟世界显得如此真实。其实，五蕴就是我们的 VR，是生来自带的初始系统。投生为人，就戴着人道的 VR；投生为动物，就会戴着狗的 VR、鸟的 VR，所见又是另一个世界。为什么会这样？佛法有个概念叫业力，它决定了我们会感得什么样的身体，

进而透过这个身体，看到相应的世界。

什么是真相？不是见闻觉知就能知晓的，所以才有宗教的探索、哲学的追问。佛法特别重视如实见。所谓如实见，就是你的认识与世界真相吻合。世间很多烦恼都和认知有关，比如面对同样的问题，不同人会有不同反应，就是认知差异造成的。开启智慧前，每个人的认识都有片面性，如果执著现有认知，觉得我明明看到是这样，为什么他的认识不同？就会造成对立、冲突与烦恼。

2. 心理问题

佛法认为，凡夫都有贪、嗔、痴三种病毒。痴就是无明，看不清真相。因为看不清，就会对世界产生错误认定，进而引发贪著、希求。当我们对事业、感情、孩子过分在乎，又会胡思乱想，导致焦虑、恐惧等心理问题，即《心经》所说的颠倒梦想。和贪相反的是嗔，对不喜欢的人和事产生对立、排斥甚至仇恨。可以说，三毒是一切心理疾病的根源。

我曾多次应邀为心理学界做讲座，并在北大、北师大等高校参与心理学界的对话。佛法自古就被称为心性之学，与心理学有着共同关心的领域。区别在于，从心理学的角度，贪嗔痴是正常的，只有过度贪嗔痴导致的心理疾病，才需要治疗。但在佛法看来，贪嗔痴是必须解决的重点，否则我们将永无宁日。此外，佛法还有禅修实践，是认识、调整心理的重要途径。现在正念风靡世界，就是因为大家感受到，修习正念可以对心性有深入了解，对心理问题的解决也更为彻底。

每个人都有两种模式，一是认知模式，一是需求模式。我们带着自己的认知模式看世界，在此过程中，又会建立种种需求。如果缺少智慧的观察和选择，可能随时都会引发情绪、产生烦恼、制造痛苦。在座各位能拥有健康的身心，为社会传递爱心，是很有福报的。因为很多人的成长是随机的，从未经过审视和设计。而现在的社会环境并不健康，充斥着功利性的价值导向、碎片化的信息洪流。如果不加分辨，就会不断往内心扔垃圾，建立不良需求。当这些需求形成惯

性，就会让我们身不由己，随波逐流。所以很多人的生命，就是一大堆错误观念，加上一大堆混乱情绪。但我们也不必气馁，在这样的状态下，内心的智慧明灯并未熄灭。关键要通过学习佛法来点亮它，照见自己，疗愈身心。

三、生命可以被设计的依据

如何改变业力
需要遵循人格密码
由接受相应的文化和思维方式
形成观念
再由观念的落实产生行为
行为的累积成为习惯
习惯的重复成为性格
性格的沉淀成为人格

从某种意义上说，生命也是一个产品。你希望自己是普通产品，还是精心打造的优质产品？我们知道，优质产品离不开设计，生命也是同样。我们希望成为美好的人，就要用心设计，才能完善人格、提升生命品质。

1. 人生目的何在

学佛是引导我们断恶修善，圆满佛菩萨那样的高尚品质。一方面要彻底清除贪嗔痴，一方面要成就大智慧和大慈悲，自利利他，自觉觉他。儒家的目标是成为有德君子，进一步，是内圣外王，成就圣贤人格。

在三不朽的人生追求中，除了立德，还要立功、立言，也是由涵养自身德行，进而建立功业、传承思想，完成从自利到利他的生命实践。

我曾和岳麓书院国学研究院朱汉民院长对谈《如何立心立命》。其中讲到，佛法和儒家思想的共通之处，都是从完善人格到造福社会，同时，造福社会又是完善人格的助缘。佛法重视慈悲，儒家强调仁爱，我们想要成就慈悲，具备仁爱，都离不开服务社会、利益众生。

佛法所说的菩提心，有觉醒和利他两个面向。菩提就是觉醒，利他则意味着，不仅要自己走向觉醒，还要帮助更多人走向觉醒。有人觉得佛法比较消极，只关心自己。其实，佛法有大小乘之分。小乘偏向个人解脱，大乘则以自利利他为使命。所以修习大乘是离不开众生的，正如《普贤行愿品》所说："一切众生而为树根，诸佛菩萨而为华果，以大悲水饶益众生，则能成就诸佛菩萨智慧华果。"果实离不开树根，我们希望成就佛菩萨那样的修行果实，必须不断利益众生。就像给树根浇水，才能使之开花结果。

2. 人有自救能力

不管儒家还是佛法修行，都以完善人格和利益众生为目标。但我们的现状，一方面是看不清自己，一方面要面对生命的各种缺陷。在这样的起点下，能否达成目标?

佛法指出，每个人都有自我拯救的能力。这是佛法和其他宗教最大的不同。一般宗教认为，人是没能力改变自己的，必须信神，借助神的恩典得到救赎。但佛法不认同世界有一个主宰神，虽然我们目前是凡夫，但生命内在都有觉醒潜质。在这点上，众生和佛无二无别。

所以生命有两个层面，就像天空，虽然会乌云密布，但背后依然是无云晴空，始终都在，并不遥远。只是我们的执著、颠倒、妄想太多，就像活在云层，所见只是身边极其有限的一部分，其他都被遮蔽，难以体会内在的清凉、宁静。即使天空偶尔出现，也会因为我们不认识，一闪而过，虽有若无。

佛教法门虽多，但在根本上，都是让我们驱散云层。尤其是禅宗，会以种种出其不意的手段，让学人

在某个契机下见到本心。就像云层变薄时，风一吹，就能显现。进一步，引导学人持续地熟悉它，保任它。通过对心的体认，就有能力安住于无云晴空，彻底解决迷惑、烦恼。

因为具备觉醒潜质，所以人是可以自我疗愈、自我救赎的。这是佛陀发现的，也是他对人类的最大贡献。

3. 生命延续的规律

不少人觉得，命运早已注定，非人力所能改变。甚至有人提出，人类是被宇宙高级生命圈养在地球上的。之所以有这些想法，因为在无限宇宙中，地球实在是微不足道。从近邻火星回望，地球不过是萤火一点。至于居住在地球的人类，更是渺若尘埃，除了随风飘摇，怎么有能力改变方向？

在佛法看来，不论浩瀚的宇宙，还是每一个生命，都遵循“因缘因果”的发展规律。我们来到世间，并不是一张白纸；能成为现在这样，也不仅仅是今生努

力，还有着无始以来的生命积累。很多人不相信轮回，觉得这是看不到的假说，无法证明。关于这个问题，我通常会提出三个理解角度。

其一，你是否相信人有天赋？事实上，从音乐、绘画、写作，到数学、物理等各个领域，人类历史上出现过不计其数的天才。他们的天赋从哪里来？无非是过去生的积累。以前学过、做过的，就是现在的天赋。如果相信天赋，就说明生命不是这一生才开始的。古人说，书到今生读已迟。为什么迟？如果没有过去生的文化熏习，今生的起点就已远远落后，想通过短短几十年的努力就成为文豪，不太可能。这并不是否认努力，从个体生命而言，所有努力都有结果，但横向比较的话，有些差异是多生累劫形成的，无法在短时间内改变。

其二，你是否相信人与人之间有缘分？我们应该有这样的经验，有些人一见就似曾相识，心生欢喜；也有些人一见就莫名不适，感到隔阂。为什么会这样？从轮回的眼光看，就很容易理解。因为在一生又一生的流转中，我们曾和众生结下无数爱恨情仇。这

些经历就像种子，埋藏在我们的潜意识中。当曾经的所缘再次出现、相遇时，种子就被唤醒，引发本能反应。

其三，你是否相信人有命运？现在有句话，叫作“投胎是个技术活”，它所带来的成长环境、教育资源，会在很大程度上影响人的一生。从佛法角度看，这个“技术”其实是过去业力感召的。包括今生的穷通祸福，也不完全是当下努力决定的，还有种种因素的共同作用。我们常常将之归结为幸运或不幸，其实正是业力使然。

虽然佛法认同命运有规律可循，但并不是宿命论，而是提出业力的概念。业就是行为，包括身体行为、语言行为、思想行为。我们会有现在的人格、价值观、兴趣爱好、思维方式，正来自业力。只要改变当下的行为、心念，就能由改变业力，改变命运的发展方向。

如何改变业力？需要遵循人格密码。由接受相应的文化和思维方式，形成观念，再由观念的落实产生行为，行为的累积成为习惯，习惯的重复成为性格，性格的沉淀成为人格。这是生命形成的七个层次。每

个生命都有它的因缘因果，我们希望有什么样的人生，就要对身口意的行为作出选择。

总之，人有自我拯救的潜能，也具备选择行为、转化因果的自主力。基于这两点，我们完全可以设计生命，实现命自我立的愿景。

四、人性，是设计生命的基础

成佛还是成魔
就在一念之间
如果修习戒定慧
认识并开启佛性
就是选择成佛的频道
如果放纵贪嗔痴
被不良串习左右
就会落入成魔的频道

设计生命的前提，是认识人性。什么是人性？

1. 善用理性

西方人推崇理性，视之为人性的核心特质和最高潜能。古希腊哲人认为，理性是人区别于其他生命的关键特质；人文主义思想家强调，人之所以尊贵，是因其拥有理性与自由意志；到启蒙时代，更将理性提升至道德与认知的根本。为什么人类有五千年文明，动物却没有？原因就在人有理性。虽然理性给我们带来非凡的文明，但也带来剥削、战争、暴政。比如希特勒认为犹太人血统有问题，要建立纯净的血统，就

得实施种族屠杀。这正是理性被扭曲为反人道的体现。

如何善用理性？需要具备两点。

首先，树立正确的人生目标。西方哲学家指出，现代文明构建的商业化系统，使人困入其中。整个生活都围绕物质，陷入工作、赚钱、消费的循环。同时，技术理性与工具理性的盛行，将人逐渐异化为生产工具。所以我们要看清，到底用理性服务于什么，是追逐利润、发展企业，还是增进人类福祉、促进社会良善？找到目标，才能让理性发挥正向作用。

其次，理性代表人类思维的高级形式，但不一定是正确的。比如经典的三段论逻辑，通过大前提、小前提、结论的推导，帮助我们构建认知。然而，这种逻辑有其根本局限。因为大前提是立足于文化传承、认知框架的基础上，人们可以根据各自立场设定大前提，再推导小前提，得出结论。但大前提本身无法彻底证明，或处在发展过程中，存在变量。比如科学研究中，从经典物理学到相对论、量子力学的演进，那些曾被视为不可动摇的大前提，正因为认知深化被不断修正、推翻，由此得出的结论也随之更新。只有在

真理指引下，建立正确的世界观、人生观、价值观，我们才能善用理性。

2. 人的两面性

中国文化中，孔子认为人性相差无几，但因为习惯、行为的不同，造就了人的差别，所谓“性相近，习相远”。这就说明培养行为的重要性，因为行为会变成习惯，最终造就性格乃至人格。

孟子提出性善论，认为人性有仁、义、礼、智四端：“恻隐之心，仁之端也；羞恶之心，义之端也；辞让之心，礼之端也；是非之心，智之端也。”端，只是一个源头，需要持续培养，让善的力量不断扩大。但孟子还提醒我们，如果一个人“饱食、暖衣、逸居而无教，则近于禽兽”。这就说明，人性是多元、复杂的存在，必须接受教育，才能发展四端，避免堕落。

关于这个问题，孟子进一步提出“良知良能”，就是依本有善端，引导自己辨别是非、践行道德、完善人格。在此基础上，王阳明又发展出“致良知”，

强调人必须自觉唤醒并践行本有良知。这一观点和佛法思想有关。佛法认为，每个人都有佛性，有善的种子；同时也有魔性，有贪嗔痴。必须接受正确教育，让善的种子得到培育，长成参天大树，才能开启佛性，断除魔性。如果不接受教育，或教育方法有问题，就可能使魔性得到发展，成为禽兽，甚至禽兽不如。

成佛还是成魔，就在一念之间。所谓一念，可以理解为内心的不同频道。如果修习戒定慧，认识并开启佛性，就是选择成佛的频道。如果放纵贪嗔痴，被不良串习左右，就会落入成魔的频道。两个频道非此即彼，选择成佛频道的同时，就在消除魔性；反之，如果没有彻底消除魔性，是不能成佛的。所谓一念成佛，一念成魔；一念天堂，一念地狱。认识到人的两面性，是设计生命的重要基础。

五、人心，是设计生命的元素

我们的心理很多，简单归纳
有负面心理和正向心理两类
负面心理会持续制造痛苦、烦恼
使人陷入自我内耗的恶性循环
正向心理能给我们
注入活力，带来快乐
同时还能向外释放善意
传递温暖、造福社会

除了人性，对人心的洞察也很重要。别院建设中，我们运用了众多元素，有传统材料，也有现代材料；有东方元素，也有西方元素。包括世间任何一个产品，都是不同元件组合而成。人格也是同样，是由各种心理共同构建的。

1. 心理自检

我们的心理活动很多，简单归纳，有负面心理和正向心理两类。负面心理会持续制造痛苦、烦恼，使人陷入自我内耗的恶性循环；正向心理能给我们注入活力，带来快乐，同时还能向外释放善意、传递温暖、

造福社会。传统心理学主要解决负面心理，以及由此引发的疾病；积极心理学侧重发展正向心理，通过优化心态，改善生命品质。

了解心理的分类和作用，我们应该对自己内心作个盘点，看看其中有哪些负面心理，如贪婪、嫉妒、仇恨、焦虑、狭隘、傲慢等等；又有哪些正向心理，如友善、温暖、谦虚、善良、宽容、调柔、慈悲等等。

进一步，还要对照自检表，看看这些心理分别达到什么程度，给自己带来哪些体验。每个人都是自身心理最直接的体验者，如人饮水，冷暖自知。此外，我们还要了解这些心理给家人带来的体验是什么，给亲戚、朋友带来的体验是什么。当你焦躁不安时，自己有哪些感受，又会如何波及他人；反之，当你宁静祥和时，自己是什么状态，又能为周围带来什么氛围。整理后就会发现，负面心理带来的体验，不仅令自己痛苦，还会殃及他人；反之，正向心理在滋养自己的同时，也让身边人受益。

我们还要知道，虽然自己目前有这些心理，但并不等于这些心理就是“我”。正如清点建筑原料时，

要分出哪些是有用之材，哪些是无用垃圾，进而作出取舍。对待我们的种种心理，同样要觉察、分辨、选择。

2. 正念和利他

经过检查和认识，我们自然会选择正向、积极的心理。在此过程中，还要消除负面心理，才能建立稳固的正向心理。

在我们的课程体系中，主要由两种途径来实现。一是通过正念修行，开启觉知，引导我们觉察并跳出负面心理的循环；一是通过利他实践，在帮助他人的过程中，培养正向心理。其中，又包括初级、中级、高级的不同次第，及认识、建立、培养、训练、熟悉、提升、圆满七个层次，由浅入深，具有很强的操作性。

每种心理都是可以通过训练培养的。现在的积极心理学也有相关练习，但佛法还有菩提心、空性见，对这些心理的训练更全面，也更深入。比如初级利他心理中，有感恩、随喜、理解、同情、接纳、布施等。

首先是感恩、随喜，让自己带着感恩心看待世界和他人，学会欣赏他人的长处。在此基础上，就能进一步理解、同情、接纳他人。具备这些心行，慈悲就不再是一句空话。

这些心理就是设计生命的材料。具备材料后，还要通过禅修，对生命重新设计、管理、组装。我曾经讲过《解脱心理学》，佛法的所有修行，都是帮助我们认识人性、人心，为如何设计生命，提供了系统性的理论指导和实践方法。





Life Can Also Be Designed

Master Jiqun

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We are living in an increasingly restless age. For more than two hundred years since the Industrial Revolution, people have directed their efforts outward, building ways of life centered on material accumulation and technological progress. With the full arrival of the AI era, technology is advancing at an exponential pace; yet the overall condition of human life has not improved accordingly. On the contrary, beneath the surface of technological prosperity lie growing imbalances and difficulties, along with increasingly widespread anxiety and confusion.

In the past, machines replaced a large amount of routine labor, making life much more convenient for people. Today, even more forms of work—including intellectual activities such as writing and design—are being taken over by AI. For many people, work is a central pillar of life: a way to realize their personal value, achieve success, prove themselves, and give structure to their days. But when these abilities are no longer unique to human beings, what is the value of being alive? Where does the path forward lie?

In 2018, I had a dialogue with the philosopher Zhou Guoping on the topic: "In the Age of Artificial Intelligence, Where Is Humanity Headed?" In our conversation, we discussed that human beings can find peace and purpose by turning inward—by understanding and improving themselves, discovering value within life itself, and becoming better human beings. No matter how far AI develops, the fundamental questions of human life must still be resolved by human beings themselves. Even the simplest activities—such as eating,

sleeping, and bodily functions—cannot be replaced by AI. How much less can it replace the inner work of adjusting our mindset, awakening wisdom, cultivating morality, and developing a sound and integrated character.

More than a hundred years ago, Philosopher Nietzsche declared that "God is dead," calling for a revaluation of all values. Today, we face a similar challenge. In the relatively stable past, we often equated having with being. We believed that having a career, fame, or wealth defined who we were. Our attention was directed toward "what we have," while "what we are" was largely overlooked. But in today's world of uncertainty, it is difficult to predict how long what we possess will last or when it might disappear. In times of poverty, people often believed that once they had money, they would gain a sense of worth and live happily. Yet as more people have become materially wealthy, it has become clear that wealth and happiness are not the same. Possessions are only the outer extension of life; the true

core lies in who we are.

Some scholars at Harvard have observed that two of the most active intellectual trends on campus today are artificial intelligence and a growing culture of healing and well-being, which includes topics ranging from physical and mental health to questions of life, death, and ultimate meaning. The latter points directly to the fundamental questions of human life—an area in which Eastern wisdom, especially the Chinese traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, has long been particularly insightful. At its core, this wisdom seeks to help people find peace and purpose in life, guiding them toward self-understanding, inner balance, and the cultivation of a wholesome character. Such wisdom, which attends to the holistic growth of human life, is especially needed in today's world.

I

Education Is About Nurturing the Person

Everyone here comes from the Motherly Love Academy and is dedicated to education. Today, however, school education largely focuses on the transmission of knowledge. Much attention is placed on which university to apply to and what major to study, with an emphasis on competition and ranking-driven evaluation. Such a narrow system of assessment creates enormous pressure and psychological strain, leaving both teachers and students feeling overwhelmed. In fact, the role of a teacher is not only to impart knowledge, but also to cultivate the whole person—to place human development at the center,

guiding students toward healthy growth rather than focusing solely on academic achievement, employment, or material survival.

Chinese cultural identity may be understood in two dimensions. One is our physical heritage, passed down through generations. The other is a cultural and spiritual lineage that shapes our character, mindset, values, and ways of engaging with the world. Confucianism emphasizes learning in order to become a fully developed person; Buddhism teaches clarity of mind and insight into one's true nature; Daoism encourages a return to simplicity and authenticity. All three place self-cultivation at the center, focusing on the cultivation and fulfillment of life itself. On this foundation, one may then contribute to family harmony, social responsibility, and the well-being of society. In figures such as Wang Wei, Liu Yuxi, Bai Juyi, Su Shi, and Wang Anshi, the teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism were deeply integrated. They upheld the Confucian spirit by actively engaging in society and serving the public, while also drawing upon Buddhist

wisdom to settle the mind and transcend worldly attachments, embodying a harmonious ideal of "engaging in the world with a transcendent mind." This tradition of thought—uniting compassion and wisdom—is especially needed in today's world.

Overseas, many Chinese parents worry that children growing up in Western educational environments may gradually lose touch with their cultural roots. For this reason, they often place great importance on learning and preserving traditional culture. By contrast, people living in China are sometimes less conscious of this issue, and it is something worth reflecting on. Biological heritage belongs only to the material dimension, while cultural lineage carries a deeper spiritual legacy. Without this inner grounding, one's cultural identity remains incomplete.

I have given many talks to the business community, which were later compiled into a book titled *Managing Business and Life*. Through my interactions with entrepreneurs, I discovered that many of them treat running a company as

if it were running their entire life. They equate business success with personal success, measuring their own worth by the size and profits of their companies. In the end, even when their businesses perform well, they do not necessarily live happily. On the contrary, years of strain and pressure often bring various physical and psychological difficulties. Therefore, becoming a fully realized person is the true foundation for sustaining and enriching life. Achieving things is only one way of realizing life's value—it is not the whole of life.

When we speak of being a good person, we naturally think of morality—such as the Confucian virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness, along with qualities like gentleness, kindness, respect, frugality, and humility. Some people feel that morality is merely a social expectation and wonder whether they will be taken advantage of if they uphold it while others do not. Such thoughts arise from focusing only on short-term gains and losses. In fact, morality forms the foundation for a meaningful and stable life;

it directly shapes how we live. In classical thought, a "beautiful person" does not refer to physical appearance, but to moral integrity and inner goodness—someone who cares for others with benevolence, upholds trustworthiness, and conducts themselves with balance and restraint in speech and action. Such a person brings a sense of harmony and goodness wherever they go. Even if moral conduct does not produce immediate material rewards, it will bring lasting and far-reaching benefits over time. In this sense, morality is a form of life wisdom: it teaches us how to conduct ourselves and how to live this life well.

II

The Most Important Design in Life

In daily life, design is everywhere—from clothing and household items to urban architecture and public spaces. Yet these forms of design are external, and our connection with them is only temporary. No matter how refined such designs may be, can they truly determine whether we are living well or happily? Clearly not. What matters most is the design of life itself: knowing what to choose, what to cultivate, and what kind of person we become. This is the design that is most deeply connected to who we are.

In my talks, I often say that "who you are is more

important than what you have." With the development of material civilization, people have increasingly turned their attention to what they possess, even mistaking having for being—confusing what is secondary for what is fundamental. If one neglects being, no amount of possession can enhance the quality of life. On the contrary, people often become burdened by what they own, weighed down by it instead. This has become a common condition in modern society.

How can we design our lives? First, through wisdom—understanding the nature of life and clarifying what quality of life we wish to cultivate. Just as in product design, one must possess the necessary knowledge and understand user needs in order to create a good design. Second, through practical methods—knowing how to put the design into action. Otherwise, no matter how good the design may be, it will remain only an idea. There is a saying: "It is easier to change rivers and mountains than to change a person's nature." This illustrates how difficult it is to transform one's life. Most people do not

truly understand themselves. They live in confusion, never considering that life itself can be designed and that one can cultivate a better version of oneself.

This is precisely where traditional Chinese culture has particular strength. It brings together Confucian moral teachings, the Buddhist wisdom of life, and the practice of meditation. All three are indispensable. Without moral grounding, there is no willingness to change oneself, and nothing can truly begin. Without wisdom, one cannot see oneself clearly or understand how to change. Without meditation, one lacks the means to calm and train the mind, and therefore the strength to carry out that change.

1. Issues of Life

To design our lives, the first step is to understand the current state. In Buddhism, there is a concept called ignorance, which literally means a lack of light. Buddhist teachings say that within every life there is a lamp of wisdom. When this lamp has not yet been lit, the

inner world remains in darkness and nothing can be seen clearly. The very reason religions and philosophies arise is that human beings are filled with confusion about life and the world. Because of this confusion, we keep searching in every direction, seeking answers. The following questions are those that humanity has pursued tirelessly for thousands of years. In philosophy, they are often called ultimate questions.

First, where do I come from? Some might say that we come from our parents, who gave birth to us. Yet what our parents provide is only the material basis of this body. Before this body was born, where was the "I"?

Second, where am I going? This is also a profound question. In Chinese culture, death has often been treated as a taboo—something people prefer not to discuss or confront. Yet when death approaches, anxiety and fear often take hold, and many depart helplessly—clinging to life, reluctant to let go, and utterly at a loss. Recently, I have been paying close attention to the field of palliative

care. When illness reaches a stage where treatment is no longer meaningful, how can a person complete the final stage of life with peace and dignity? This is a question we must reflect upon. In ancient times, a fulfilled life was described as being blessed with the Five Blessings, one of which was a good death. Yet today, such peaceful endings are rare. More often, people endure great suffering through repeated medical interventions, dying with little dignity or quality of life.

Third, who am I? In the Great Meditation Hall of Amrita Retreat Center, there is a plaque bearing the words "Original Face; Original Mind." It reminds us to ask: what truly represents "I"? Many people take the body or physical appearance to be the self, or identify the self with career, status, or honors. Yet these things only temporarily belong to us; they are not our true self. The "false self" formed in this way requires constant external support in order to be sustained. When our sense of security is built upon external conditions, we naturally hope that our careers will last forever and our status will endure

indefinitely. Yet the reality we face is a world characterized by impermanence and change. Especially today, change is occurring at an unprecedented speed. This uncertainty shakes our expectation of permanence, leaving many people anxious, distressed, and insecure. The study and practice of Buddhism helps us see clearly what truly represents the "I." Before a single thought arises, what is our "Original Face"? Only by understanding this can we find an unchanging ground within a constantly changing world.

Fourth, what is the true nature of the world? Modern science has discovered that only about four percent of the universe is visible to us, while the remaining ninety-six percent consists of dark matter and dark energy, which we cannot directly perceive. From a Buddhist perspective, our knowledge and perception of the world are extremely limited because they are constrained by our cognitive faculties. We often assume that what we see with our own eyes must be real and objective. How could it possibly be otherwise? Have you ever worn a VR headset? Once

you put it on, the virtual world can feel strikingly real. In a similar way, the Five Aggregates function like the VR system through which we experience the world. They are the operating system we are born with. When we are born as human beings, we experience the world through a "human-mode" VR. If we were born as animals, we would experience the world through a "dog-mode" VR or a "bird-mode" VR, and what we perceive would be a completely different world. Why is this so? Buddhism explains this through the concept of karma. Karma determines the kind of body we are born with, and through that body we come to perceive a corresponding world.

What is the truth of the world? It is not something that can be fully known through ordinary perception—through seeing, hearing, and sensing alone. This is why religions arise and philosophy continues to ask its deepest questions. Buddhism places particular emphasis on seeing things as they truly are. Such seeing means that one's understanding is aligned with the actual nature of reality. Many of our afflictions in life arise from the way

we perceive and interpret things. For example, when different people face the same situation, they often react in very different ways. These differences arise from differences in understanding. Before wisdom is awakened, everyone's understanding is inevitably partial. If we cling to our existing views and think, "I see it clearly this way, so why does he see it differently?" This easily gives rise to opposition, conflict, and suffering.

2. Issues of the Mind

Buddhism teaches that ordinary people are influenced by the Three Poisons: greed, aversion, and ignorance. Ignorance refers to delusion—an inability to see reality clearly. Because we do not see clearly, we form mistaken views of the world, which in turn give rise to attachment and desires. When we become overly attached to career, relationships, or children, the mind easily becomes entangled in restless thoughts, leading to anxiety, fear, and other psychological distress. This is what the *Heart Sutra* describes as "delusional dreams." The opposite of greed

is aversion—the tendency to resist, reject, or even hate people and situations we dislike. In this sense, the Three Poisons are the root of many forms of mental afflictions.

I have been invited to give lectures to the psychology community, and to participate in dialogues with psychologists at universities such as Peking University and Beijing Normal University. Since ancient times, Buddhism has been described as "the study of the mind," and it shares many areas of concern with psychology. The difference lies in perspective. From the standpoint of psychology, greed, aversion, and ignorance are considered natural tendencies of the human mind. Only when they become excessive and lead to psychological disorders are they seen as conditions that require treatment. From a Buddhist perspective, however, greed, aversion, and ignorance must be addressed at their root; otherwise, the mind will never find lasting peace. Moreover, Buddhism offers meditation practices that provide practical methods for understanding and transforming the mind. Nowadays, mindfulness has become popular around the world

precisely because people have discovered that through practicing mindfulness, one can gain deeper insight into the workings of the mind and address psychological problems in a more fundamental way.

Each person operates through two modes: a cognitive mode and a mode of needs and desires. We view the world through our cognitive patterns, and in the process we develop various needs and expectations. Without wise observation and discernment, emotions can easily be triggered, giving rise to distress and suffering. Those of you here who enjoy physical and mental well-being and can contribute kindness to society are truly blessed. Many people grow up in a largely random way, without ever examining or consciously shaping their lives. Moreover, today's social environment is far from healthy. It is filled with utilitarian value systems and an endless flood of fragmented information. If we lack discernment, we continually throw mental "garbage" into our minds, forming unhealthy desires. Once these desires become habitual, we lose our inner autonomy and are carried along by the

current. As a result, many lives become little more than a mixture of mistaken views and tangled emotions. Yet there is no need to feel discouraged. Even in such a state, the lamp of inner wisdom has not been extinguished. The key is to study and practice the Dharma so that this lamp can be lit—allowing us to see ourselves clearly and bring healing to both body and mind.

III

Why Life Can Be Designed

In a certain sense, life itself is also a product. Would you like to be an ordinary product, or a carefully crafted, high-quality one? We know that high-quality products require thoughtful design, and life is no different. If we hope to become better human beings, we must design our lives with care, so as to refine our character and elevate the quality of our lives.

1. What Is the Purpose of Life

Practicing Buddhism guides us to cease unwholesome actions and cultivate wholesome ones, ultimately perfecting

the noble qualities of buddhas and bodhisattvas. On the one hand, it requires the complete elimination of greed, aversion, and ignorance; on the other, it aims at the realization of great wisdom and great compassion, thereby benefiting self and others and awakening oneself and others. Confucianism aims at becoming a virtuous person, a *junzi*; at a higher level, it aspires to serve the people with kingly virtue and achieve the character of a sage. Among the three imperishables in life, one must go beyond establishing virtue to establish both merit and teachings. This unfolds through nurturing moral character, building achievements, and transmitting thought, completing a life practice that moves from self-benefit to the benefit of others.

I once had a dialogue with Zhu Hanmin, Director of the Institute of Chinese Studies at the Yuelu Academy, on the topic "How to Establish One's Mind and One's Life." We discussed the common ground between Buddhism and Confucian thought: both move from perfecting personal character to benefiting society, and at the same time,

benefiting society serves as a supportive condition for perfecting character. Buddhism emphasizes compassion, and Confucianism stresses benevolence. To realize compassion and embody benevolence, we cannot do without serving society and benefiting all beings.

In Buddhism, bodhicitta has two dimensions: awakening and altruism. Bodhi signifies awakening, while altruism means not only awakening oneself, but also helping others awaken. Some people regard Buddhism as passive or concerned only with personal liberation. In fact, Buddhism distinguishes between the Theravada and the Mahayana. The Theravada emphasizes individual liberation, whereas the Mahayana takes benefiting both oneself and others as its mission. Accordingly, Mahayana practice cannot be separated from sentient beings. As stated in the *Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*: "All sentient beings are the roots of the tree; all buddhas and bodhisattvas are its flowers and fruits. By nourishing sentient beings with the water of great compassion, one can accomplish the wisdom flowers and fruits of the buddhas

and bodhisattvas." Just as fruits cannot exist without roots, if we wish to attain the fruits of practice like those of buddhas and bodhisattvas, we must continually benefit sentient beings—like watering the roots so that the tree may blossom and bear fruit.

2. Human Beings Possess the Capacity for Self-Liberation

Whether in Confucian self-cultivation or Buddhist practice, the goal is to refine one's character and benefit others. Yet our present condition is such that, on the one hand, we do not clearly see ourselves, and on the other hand, we must face the many limitations and imperfections of human life. Starting from such a point, can we still achieve this goal?

Buddhism points out that every person possesses the capability for self-liberation. This is one of the greatest differences between Buddhism and other religions. Many religions hold that human beings lack the ability to

change themselves and must believe in a god, relying on divine grace for salvation. Buddhism does not acknowledge a creator god who governs the world. Although we are presently ordinary beings, within life itself there exists the potential for awakening. In this respect, sentient beings and buddhas are not different.

Thus, life is like the sky, with two layers. Although it may be covered by dark clouds, behind them there is always a clear, cloudless sky—ever-present and never far away. It is only because our attachments, distortions, and delusive thoughts are so numerous that we live as though we were dwelling within the clouds. What we see is only a very limited area around us; everything else is obscured, making it hard to experience the inner coolness and tranquility. Even when the sky occasionally reveals itself, because we do not recognize it, it passes in a flash—seeming to exist, yet as if it does not.

Although there are many methods in Buddhism, at their core they all aim to disperse the clouds that obscure the

mind. In particular, Chan Buddhism employs various unexpected means to enable practitioners, at a certain moment, to see their original mind. It is like when the clouds thin out—one gust of wind, and the sky is revealed. Further, practitioners are guided to become continuously familiar with it and to sustain it. Through direct recognition of the mind, one gains the ability to abide in the cloudless sky, thoroughly resolving confusion and afflictions.

Since we possess the potential for awakening, human beings are capable of self-healing and self-liberation. This is what the Buddha discovered, and it is his greatest contribution to humanity.

3. The Principles of Life's Continuity

Many people feel that destiny has already been predetermined and cannot be changed by human effort. Some even suggest that human beings are kept on Earth by higher forms of life in the universe. Such ideas

arise because, within the vast universe, Earth appears extremely small and insignificant. Seen from nearby Mars, Earth would be no more than a "pale blue dot." As for human beings living on this tiny planet, we seem even more insignificant—like dust drifting in the wind. If that is the case, how could we possibly have the power to steer our own course?

From the Buddhist perspective, both the vast universe and each individual life follow the law of causes and conditions. We do not come into this world as blank slates. Who we are today is not determined solely by the efforts of this lifetime, but also by the accumulation of life from beginningless time. Many people do not believe in samsara, thinking it is an unprovable hypothesis. On this issue, I usually offer three perspectives for understanding.

First, do you believe that people possess innate talents? Throughout human history, countless geniuses have emerged in fields such as music, painting, writing, mathematics, and physics. Where do their talents come from?

They are nothing other than accumulations from past lives. What was learned and practiced before becomes talent in the present. If one acknowledges the existence of talent, it suggests that life did not begin only in this lifetime. The ancients once said, "By the time one reads books in this life, it is already too late." Why is it considered late? Without cultural cultivation carried over from past lives, the starting point in this life is already far behind. To become a great writer through only a few decades of effort is unlikely. This is not to deny the value of effort. From the perspective of an individual life, every effort bears fruit. Yet in comparison across individuals, some differences are formed over many lifetimes and cannot be changed in a short time.

Second, do you believe that there are karmic affinities between people? We all have such experiences: with some people, we feel an immediate sense of familiarity and joy; with others, we feel inexplicably uneasy or distant upon meeting. Why does this happen? From the perspective of samsara, it is easy to understand. Over countless lifetimes,

we have formed innumerable bonds of love and hatred with sentient beings. These experiences are like seeds buried deep in the subconscious. When former objects of connection reappear and we meet again, those seeds are awakened, giving rise to instinctive responses.

Third, do you believe that human beings have a destiny? There is a popular saying today: "Being born well is a kind of skill." One's family background, environment, and access to education all have a profound influence on the course of a life. From a Buddhist perspective, this so-called "skill" is in fact the result of karmic forces accumulated in the past. Even the fortunes and misfortunes of this life are not determined solely by present effort, but arise from the combined effects of many causes and conditions. What we often call luck or misfortune is, in truth, the unfolding of karma.

Although Buddhism acknowledges that destiny follows discernible patterns, it is not fatalism. Instead, it introduces the concept of karma. Karma refers to action—physical,

verbal, and mental. Our present personality, values, interests, and ways of thinking all arise from karma. By changing our current actions and intentions, we can transform karma and thereby alter the direction in which destiny unfolds.

How do we change karma? We must follow the pattern by which character is formed. By accepting certain cultures and ways of thinking, we form views; when views are put into practice, they produce behavior; accumulated behavior becomes habits; repeated habits shape character; and, over time, character solidifies into personality. These are the seven layers through which life is formed. Every life unfolds according to its own causes and conditions. If we wish to live a certain kind of life, we must make conscious choices in our actions of body, speech, and mind.

In sum, human beings possess both the potential for self-liberation and the autonomy to choose their actions and transform causes and effects. On this basis, we are

fully capable of designing our lives and realizing the vision of shaping our own destiny.

IV

Human Nature: The Foundation for Designing Life

To design life, one must first understand human nature. What, then, is human nature?

1. The Proper Use of Reason

Western thought values reason and sees it as the core of human nature and our highest potential. Ancient Greek philosophers have argued that reason is what sets human beings apart from other forms of life. Humanist thinkers later emphasized that human dignity comes from reason and free will, and by the time of the Enlightenment,

reason had been elevated to the very foundation of morality and knowledge. This is why humans have developed five thousand years of civilization, while animals have not. Yet although reason has enabled extraordinary achievements, it has also given rise to exploitation, war, and tyranny. History shows that reason, when distorted by ideology, can even be used to justify atrocities such as genocide.

How, then, can reason be used wisely? Two things are essential.

First, we must establish a clear and meaningful purpose in life. Many Western philosophers have pointed out that modern civilization has created a highly commercialized system that draws people deeply into it. Life becomes centered on material pursuits, trapping us in a cycle of working, earning, and consuming. At the same time, technological and instrumental rationality increasingly dominate our lives, gradually alienating human beings and turning us into mere tools of production. We

therefore need to ask ourselves: what should reason ultimately serve? The pursuit of profit and corporate expansion, or the well-being of humanity and the flourishing of society? Only when the goal is clear can reason play a truly positive role.

Second, although reason represents a higher form of human thinking, it is not necessarily correct. For example, classical syllogistic logic derives conclusions through a major premise, a minor premise, and a final conclusion, helping us structure our understanding. Yet this form of reasoning has fundamental limitations. The major premise itself is grounded in cultural traditions and underlying cognitive frameworks. People may adopt different major premises based on their own perspectives, and from there derive minor premises and conclusions. However, the major premise itself cannot be fully proven, and may still be evolving, with many variables involved. For example, in scientific inquiry, the progression from classical physics to relativity and quantum mechanics shows how earlier assumptions were gradually revised or

overturned as understanding deepened. Premises once regarded as unshakable have been continually reexamined and refined, and the conclusions drawn from them have changed accordingly. This is why reason alone is not enough. Only when it is guided by truth—when we have a sound worldview, a clear outlook on life, and healthy values—can reason be used well.

2. The Dual Nature of Human Beings

In Chinese culture, Confucius taught that human nature is largely the same for everyone. What makes people different, he said, comes from habits and behaviors—hence the saying, "By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart." This reminds us how important behavior is. What we do repeatedly becomes habit, and over time, those habits shape our character and personality.

Mencius proposed the doctrine that human nature is inherently good. He believed that human nature contains

four moral "sprouts": benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. As he famously said, "The feeling of commiseration is the beginning of benevolence. The feeling of shame and dislike is the beginning of righteousness. The feeling of modesty and complaisance is the beginning of propriety. The feeling of right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom." A sprout, however, is only a beginning. It needs constant cultivation for goodness to grow. Mencius also claims that "if a person is well fed, warmly clad, and comfortably lodged, without being taught at the same time, they become almost like the beasts." This shows that human nature is complex and multi-faceted, and that only through proper education can these moral sprouts develop rather than decay.

Building on this, Mencius introduced the idea of "innate moral knowledge and ability"—the capacity to draw on our inborn moral sprouts to distinguish right from wrong, practice virtue, and refine our character. Later, Wang Yangming developed this further with his teaching of "extend the innate knowledge of good," stressing that

people must consciously awaken and live out this inner moral awareness. This line of thought closely resonates with Buddhism.

Buddhism teaches that every person possesses Buddha-nature—the seed of goodness—but also demonic-nature, marked by greed, aversion, and ignorance. Only through proper education and practice can the seeds of goodness be nurtured into a great tree, allowing Buddha-nature to awaken and demonic-nature to be eliminated. Without education, or with misguided education, demonic-nature can grow instead, turning a person into a beast—or even worse than a beast.

In this sense, becoming a buddha or a demon depends on a single thought. This "single thought" can be understood as choosing between different inner channels. When we cultivate precepts, concentration, and wisdom, we activate Buddha-nature—this is choosing the channel of Buddhahood. When we give free rein to greed, aversion and ignorance, and follow harmful habits, we fall into

the channel of demonhood. These two channels cannot coexist. Choosing the path of Buddhahood is, at the same time, the process of eliminating demonic-nature. Conversely, without fully eradicating demonic-nature, one cannot attain Buddhahood. As the saying goes: "A single thought can awaken to Buddhahood, and a single thought can sink into delusion. A single thought can rise toward heavenly states, and a single thought can fall into realms of suffering." Recognizing this dual potential of human beings is a crucial foundation for designing one's life.

V

Mental Factors: The Elements of Life Design

Beyond understanding human nature, insight into the human mind is equally important. When we designed the Amrita Retreat Center, we used many different elements—traditional materials as well as modern ones, Eastern elements alongside Western ones. In fact, any product in the world is made up of different components. Human character is no different. It is constructed from many different mental factors.

1. Mental Self-Examination

The mind contains many different mental states. Broadly speaking, they can be divided into two types: negative and positive. Negative mental states continually generate suffering and distress, trapping us in a vicious cycle of inner exhaustion. On the other hand, positive mental states energize us, bring joy, and enable us to extend kindness, warmth, and benefit to others and to society. Traditional psychology mainly focuses on addressing negative mental states and the disorders they cause, while positive psychology emphasizes cultivating positive mindsets to improve the quality of life.

Once we understand these categories and their effects, we should examine our minds carefully. What negative states do we find—such as greed, jealousy, hatred, anxiety, narrow-mindedness, or arrogance? And what positive states are present—such as friendliness, warmth, humility, kindness, tolerance, gentleness, and compassion?

Next, we should examine to what extent these mental states arise in our minds, and what kinds of experiences they bring. Each of us directly experiences the states of our own mind. Like drinking water, only the one who drinks knows whether it is warm or cold. We should also notice how these states affect our family, relatives, and friends. When you are restless or anxious, how do you feel, and how does that state ripple out to others? And when you are calm and at ease, what is your inner experience, and what kind of atmosphere do you create around you? When we reflect in this way, we will see that negative mental states not only cause our own suffering but also affect others, while positive states nourish ourselves and benefit those around us.

It is also important to recognize that although these mental states are currently present in our minds, they are not who we are. Just as when sorting building materials we distinguish what is useful from what is waste, we should likewise observe, discern, and choose among our mental states.

2. Mindfulness and Altruism

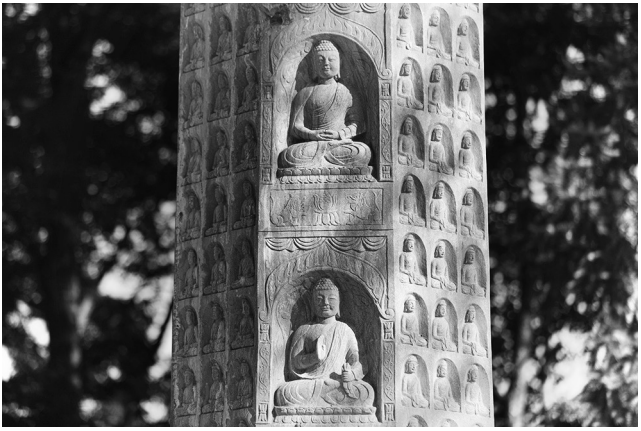
Through examining and understanding our mental states, we naturally begin to choose positive and wholesome ones. At the same time, we must gradually remove negative mental states in order to establish a stable foundation for positive qualities of mind.

In our curriculum, this is mainly achieved through two approaches. One is mindfulness practice, which unlocks awareness and helps us recognize and step out of the cycles of negative mental states. The other is altruistic practice. By helping others, we cultivate positive mental qualities within ourselves. These practices are arranged in progressive stages—beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Within each stage, development unfolds through seven phases: recognition, establishment, cultivation, training, familiarization, deepening, and completion. This gradual progression from the simple to the profound makes the system highly practical and applicable.

Every mental quality can be cultivated through training. Contemporary positive psychology also offers related practices, but Buddhism provides a more comprehensive and deeper training of the mind through teachings such as bodhicitta and the wisdom of emptiness. For example, at the beginner level of altruistic practice, we cultivate qualities such as gratitude, appreciative joy, understanding, empathy, acceptance, and generosity. We begin with gratitude and appreciative joy, learning to view the world and others with a grateful heart and to appreciate the strengths and goodness in others. On this basis, understanding, empathy, and acceptance naturally deepen. When these qualities are present, compassion is no longer just an abstract idea.

These mental states are the materials with which we design our lives. Once the materials are in place, we must further use meditation practice to redesign, manage, and reorganize our inner life. I have previously given talks on "The Psychology of Liberation." In fact, all Buddhist practices aim to help us understand human nature and

the human mind, offering a systematic theoretical framework and practical methods for designing life.





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静心学堂为“国际静心协会”旗下的核心公益品牌，致力于传承生命觉醒教育，为现代人提供安顿身心、安身立命之道。我们推广的静心学堂课程体系，为汉传佛教济群长老以四十年修学所证，对当代佛教教育的探索，包括禅意生活、智慧人生和觉醒之道。同时，我们将在世界各地营造具有禅意的空间、彼此增上的氛围，为大众修学保驾护航。

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Mindful Peace International (MPI), established in 2021 in Zurich, Switzerland, is a non-profit organization dedicated to spreading Buddhist wisdom and promoting a Chan-inspired life globally.

The Mindful Peace Academy serves as the core public welfare brand under Mindful Peace International. We are dedicated to passing on education about life awakening and offering modern individuals ways towards physical and mental well-being, thereby helping them ground themselves and discover their life's mission. The curriculum we promote at the Mindful Peace Academy has been authenticated by Master Jiqun, an eminent elder of Han Buddhism, through forty years of study and practice. It represents an exploration of contemporary Buddhist education, encompassing teachings on the Chan-inspired Life, the Wisdom for Living, and the Path to Awakening. Moreover, we are committed to creating Chan-inspired spaces and fostering mutually enriching environments worldwide to safeguard the public's learning journey.

The Mindful Peace Academy Collection showcases a selection of courses on the Chan-inspired Life and the Wisdom for Living. We sincerely hope that through these courses, more individuals will engage with life awakening education and share in the blessings that Eastern wisdom brings to humanity.

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