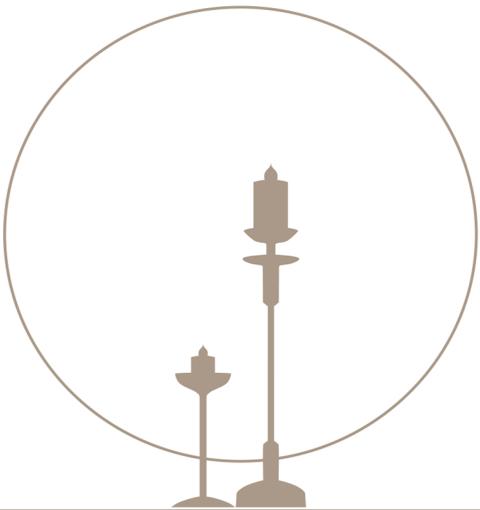
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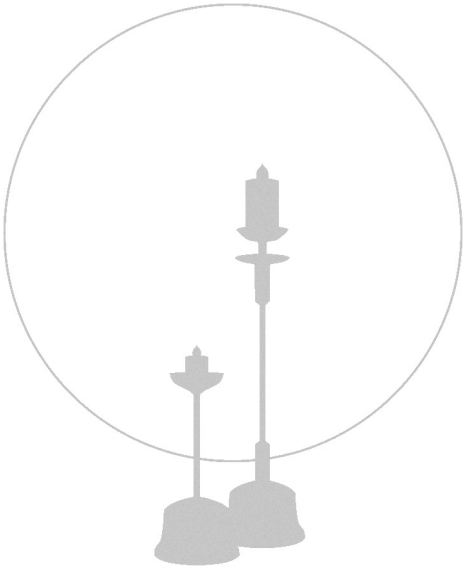
生命的回归

Returning to the Essence of Life



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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今天，我要给大家讲的内容是：生命的回归。

生命盛开在我们目光所及的每个角落，使世界充满勃勃的生机，使人类社会得以延续并发展。从广义上说，不仅自然界的一切机体都蕴含着生命力量，甚至星辰和整个星系，也有自身形成、发展及消亡的生命过程。

在一切生命现象中，人生无疑是我们最切身也最关注的问题。人生，简单地说，就是我们从出生到死亡经历的过程，由生活、生死和生命三个部分组成。

通常，人们最关心的是生活。生活有两个层次，一是基本生存，一是生存质量。

人活着，首先面临的是生存问题。俗话说，“民

以食为天”，我们的身体离不开维持运转的能量。除了这根本的一条，家庭开支也是我们每天需要面对，需要解决的。有些人福报大，出生在富有之家，财富与生俱来。尤其是中国人，做父母的喜欢为儿女积聚财产，好使孩子一辈子不必为生存奔波。而在一些发达国家，社会福利制度比较健全，基本生存似乎也不成问题。但世界上还有很多人，一生都在为生存而忙碌。天天上班，拼命打工，无非是为稻粱谋，无非是为了保障家庭开支。他们活着的目的非常单纯，单纯到只剩下“生存”二字。

其实，自然界中的动物，空中的飞鸟、海里的游鱼和地上的走兽，它们和人一样，也是为了生存，为了充饥而四处觅食。假如人类也仅仅为生存而生存，那和动物有什么区别？作为每一个生命体来说，生存都是必不可少的，但只有人类才会在解决生存问题之后，进一步追求生活质量。

在享乐主义盛行的今天，几乎所有人都着眼于物质条件的改善。事实上，改善物质所能给予的帮助，远非我们以为的那么见效。所以更为内省的人开始转

向精神追求，讲究生活品位的提升，即艺术的生活、宗教的生活。可以说，精神生活基于对自身的超越，是人类区别于自然界其他生物所特有的现象。

除了我们共同关心的生活话题，几千年来，一代又一代的哲学家和宗教家都致力于生死问题的探讨。作为伴随人类一生的两大属性，生和死，既相互否定，又密不可分。

如果将一个人的出生作为人生旅途的起点，那么从他来到这个世界开始，每时每刻都在接近旅途的终点，在奔向他的末日。正是由于我们的生，带来了无法回避的死亡。正如一位哲人所说的那样：每个生命的经验均以死为方向，这乃是生命经验之本质。

那么，生从何来，死往何去？依唯物论者的观点：生从父母来。身体发肤受之父母，妈妈生下我，我就有了。而生命结束就意味着一切的消失——人死如灯灭。死亡作为个体生命的终点，充分展现了人生的有限。

依一般宗教的普遍看法：人在肉体之外，还有独立的灵魂。色身固然会在几十年后败坏，会受到时间

限制，会退出历史舞台，但超然于肉体之外的灵魂是不死的，并将在另一个世界得到延续。基督教的教义正是建立在对永生的期待上：受到限制的尘世生命在上帝拯救下，分享上帝的生命而获得不灭的新生。在他们虔诚的祈祷中，死亡作为通向天堂的门户，又意味着新生的开始。

唯物主义者认为，生命是物质的产物，形散则神灭，属于断灭论、一世论。但我们应当认识到，科学只能研究和改造外部世界，对于人类自身的认识，却显得力不从心。相对于唯物主义者的结论，宗教家提倡的两世论，认为生命中有独立不变的灵魂，又落入了常见，同样是不究竟的。

佛陀依缘起的智慧考察生命现象，提出三世论，认为生命是相似相续、不常不断的。生命不仅包括现在，还有着生生不已的过去和未来。生命就像流水，从无穷的过去一直延续到无尽的未来；生命又像铁链，一环套着一环。我们这一期的人生，仅仅是其中的一片浪花，一个环节。

从唯物论的角度看，人生的确很短暂。可是通过

佛法智慧认识人生，我们会发现：人其实是不会“死”的。所谓死，只是一期生命的结束，是生命形式的改变，但同时也是下期生命的开始。作为学佛者，不仅要关心现实人生的幸福，同时要关心未来生命的走向。正是基于对生命的整体关怀，佛陀在成就解脱后，为娑婆众生开示了现世乐、来世乐和涅槃究竟乐的原理。

生活是生命的表现形式，生死是一期生命的开始和终结。但人生最本质的，不是生活，不是生死，而是生命。要想改变命运，必须认识到——生命究竟是什么？

诗人说：生命是神圣的谜，是机密的法则。

生物学家说：生命是蛋白质，是氨基酸。

以佛法角度来看，这些说法都不完整。作为万物之灵，我们只有以智慧破译出生命密码，才能更好地认识并利用今生，而不是在无知或敬畏中采取回避的姿态。

生命由两大系统组成：一是物质系统，一是精神系统。物质就是我们现有的色身，即生物学家所说的，组成肉体的那些成分。我们的身体来自父母，带着父

母给予的遗传基因。而精神同样有着独立的系统，有自身的遗传信息，那就是阿赖耶识中储藏的无始以来的业因。我们在生活中会发现，相同的父母会生出秉性、天资完全不同的子女。原因是什么？因为每个生命都是带着独立的生命信息来到世界，起点各不相同。

我经常说，学佛是真正意义上的生命工程。学佛，是生命从缺陷走向圆满的过程，是生命从烦恼痛苦走向解脱自在的过程，是从认识生命到彻底改善生命的过程。明白人生是什么，知道改造生命的重要性，我们就可以正式开始讨论“生命的回归”。我想从三个方面加以说明。

一、认识的回归

名和实究竟是不是同一样东西
事实上
名只是后天的约定俗成
是帮助我们认识和区分事物的符号
但我们往往不了解这一点
以名为实，并因为对名的执著
带来许多不必要的烦恼

在生活中，除了赖以生存的基本物质条件，能对我们产生最直接影响的就是人生观。我们会想什么，做什么，说什么，都离不开观念的影响。观念和行为又是相辅相成的。一方面，观念会指导行为，决定我们的各种选择。另一方面，这些行为的结果也会影响并改变观念。可以说，我们成长的过程，就是认识世界和人生的过程。

遗憾的是，一般人的观念往往是错误的。因为观念来自认识，而认识又是以感觉为基础的。通常，我们总是习惯性地认同自己的感觉，将见闻觉知的现象当作唯一真实。那我们的感觉是否值得信赖呢？事实上，人的感觉是有很大问题的。

首先，我们的感觉非常迟钝。在嘈杂的环境中，微小的声音会被淹没，使我们无法听清，甚至完全感觉不到。听觉如此，那我们的视觉呢？在黑暗中，即便最亮丽的色彩、最优美的风景也形同虚设。如果不借助科学仪器，人类所能觉知的范围极其有限：太小的东西我们看不到，需要显微镜；太远的东西我们看不到，需要望远镜……盲人摸象的故事大家都很熟悉，在某种意义上，我们和故事中的盲人并没有太大区别。仅凭感官，我们看到的不过是大千世界呈现的微小局部，却看不到背后更为巨大的整体和真相。如果认识不到这一点，执著于自己对世界的肤浅认识，那么在此基础上产生的观念，能有几分准确性呢？

其次，我们的感觉带有错乱性。自古以来，人们一直以为月有阴晴圆缺，其实月亮何尝有过这些变化？我们的地球时刻都在自转，所谓“坐地日行八万里”，可谁也感觉不到。长期以来，人们一直将地球当作宇宙中心，直到 16 世纪，哥白尼才首次提出地球在围绕太阳转动。对于那个时代而言，他的发现是令人震惊的，是大逆不道的邪说。可以想象，如果我

们的认识还停留在当时，大约也很难相信这个和感觉全然不同的事实。

天上的星辰在我们看来，小得似乎可以抓在手中，但天文学家告诉我们：它们中的许多，比地球要大得多。而其中的一部分，在我们看到时早已不复存在，只是因为它们散发的光芒，需要几千甚至几万年才能抵达我们的视线范围。当我们坐在船中，感觉两岸青山在缓缓移动，实际两岸是静止的，是船的前进使我们造成了错觉；当一支笔插入水中，看起来像是弯的，那是水的折射欺骗了我们的眼睛……

那么，感觉的错乱能否通过科学得到纠正呢？现代人相信科学，以此为检验真理的标准。其实在过去几百年中，随着科学的进步，每个时代都建构了不同的理论体系。一些貌似真理的结论，在不断接受新的挑战，不断被推翻。由此可见，在认识世界的问题上，我们的感觉固然不可靠，处于发展中的科学也不是绝对真理。

我们对世界的认识，还受到情绪的影响。当我们喜欢一个人的时候，他的缺点，我们会视为优点；而

当我们讨厌一个人的时候，他的优点，我们会当作缺点。当我们心情舒畅时，眼前的一切显得无比美好：阳光格外灿烂，天空格外明朗，树木在向你点头，花朵在向你微笑，小鸟在为你歌唱，蝴蝶在为你起舞……世界到处充满勃勃生机。而当我们心情压抑时，同样的世界却失去了色彩，笼罩在一片沉重的灰色中。

亲情和血缘，则使认识带有浓厚的感情色彩。在父母眼中，自己的孩子总显得特别重要，时时牵动着父母的心。而在不相关的人看来，这个孩子和千千万万的孩子不会有任何区别，甚至他的存在都是可有可无的。热恋中的男女，彼此把对方看得和生命一样重要，对方的一举一动，都能给自己带来巨大的欣喜或伤害。对旁人而言，那不过是缤纷世界的一段小小插曲。

感觉和情绪的影响，使我们难以正确认识世界。而在一系列颠倒的认识中，名称和实质的混淆，更是常犯的错误。事物都有名和实两方面。比如桌子，既有构成桌子的实物，也有定义桌子的名称。那么，名和实究竟是不是同一样东西？事实上，名只是后天的

约定俗成，是帮助我们认识和区分事物的符号。但我们往往不了解这一点，以名为实，并因为对名的执著，带来许多不必要的烦恼。

生活中，我们最敏感、最在乎的名是什么？是自己的名字。其实名字不过是父母为我们取的代号，就像一号、二号那样，没有特定自性。但我们有了这个代号后，就会执著代号为“我”。听到别人提起自己名字时，耳朵马上会变得很长：是不是在说我？在说些什么？如果听到赞叹和恭维，就欢喜；如果听到诽谤和攻击，就难过。对名的执著，使我们无法忍受他人的谩骂。听到别人骂你是驴、是猪、是笨蛋，会无比气愤，觉得人格受到了侮辱。事实上，驴、猪、笨蛋只是假名而已。如果对不懂中文的老外说“你是驴”，他根本不知道你在说些什么，也不会因此愤愤不平。

错觉又使我们把假相当作真实的存在。从佛法观点来看，万物都是因缘和合的假相。比如眼前这张桌子，只是一大堆材料的组合，包括木材、铁钉、人工等。由这些非桌子的条件，组成一个用品，古人出于

使用的方便，为它安立“桌子”的名称。倘若有一天，这堆条件中的某一位提出辞职或病故，桌子也将呜呼哀哉！由此可见，桌子并不是独存不变的实体，也不是天生就该叫作桌子，只是一个沿用至今的约定而已。如果古人称它为妖怪，那我们现在看到的桌子，就个个都是妖怪了。如果是这样的话，我们听到妖怪一词，就觉得极其平常，更不会谈妖色变。桌子是这样，万事万物都是同样。

《金刚经》告诉我们：“一切有为法，如梦幻泡影，如露亦如电，应作如是观。”一切存在都是缘起的假相，并没有独存、不变、可以主宰的自性。如果我们对所见一切都能如此分析，就不会产生种种执著，也不会被它们的变化所影响，所谓不以物役，不随境转。

人类认识上的另一误区，是对永恒的期待。我们总希望和自己有关的一切都能永恒：希望生命永恒，希望事业永恒，希望财富永恒，希望家庭永恒，希望人际关系永恒……然而，世间一切都是无常变化的。如果认识不到这一点，不能放下对永恒的期待，就会因此受到伤害。我们希望财富永恒，就无法面对公司

的破产；希望家庭永恒，就无法面对家庭的破裂；希望人际关系永恒，就无法面对朋友的疏远；希望爱情永恒，就无法面对情人的变心……但变化时刻都在发生，如果我们不能接受，就会陷入痛苦，演绎出一幕幕人间悲剧。

所以，改变人生首先要从改变认识开始，从树立正确人生观开始。西方哲学从古希腊的探讨宇宙本体，到 16 世纪后开始转向认识论，正反映了认识能力的重要性。我们有什么样的认识，就会看到什么样的世界，度过什么样的人生。

让我们的认识回归世界的真实！在每个当下都能如实观察，不被假相蒙蔽，不受情绪影响，也不为任何外在因素干扰。就像桌上有五个苹果，在我们的认识中也是五个苹果，不要增益，也不要损减。包括对生活、生死、生命的认识，都是如此。

怎样才能如实认识，建立正确观念？这离不开佛法智慧。时至今日，即使在不同信仰的人看来，佛陀也堪称人类历史上最伟大的思想家，正如人类学家列维·斯特劳斯所说："从我所见闻的大师或是哲人的

著作中，从我所深入了解过的那些社会里，从西方人引为骄傲的所谓科学中，我究竟懂得些什么呢？即使把它们全加在一起，与坐在树下的圣贤的沉思冥想相比，也不过是些片言只语罢了。”

这种智慧是通过修行证悟的，是对宇宙人生本质的揭示，不会因为时代的发展而落伍，在今天依然有着现实的指导意义。佛法认为，一切迷惑都源于众生的无明，这是错误观念的根源，也是烦恼、痛苦乃至犯罪的根源。所以修行首先要建立正见，从闻思修、四法行到八正道，都是以正见为前提。

正见无常，可以摆脱对永恒的执著。人总是生活在永恒的情结中，希望身边的一切不离不弃。然而世事无常，结果时常面临事与愿违的痛苦。正见无常，可以正确面对所有变化，不论挫折还是顺利，也不论失败还是成功，都是暂时的，都要经历成住坏空的过程，都处在不断的转变中。

正见无我，可以摆脱由我执产生的烦恼。这是贪嗔痴的根源，由此造下杀盗淫妄种种恶业。正见无我，才能从根本上解除烦恼。

正见因缘因果，可以避免主观、片面、狭隘的认识，如实看待世界，善巧处理事务。正见因缘因果，我们就有能力坦然面对种种顺逆境界。面对顺境不必骄傲自得，因为那是过去种下的善因所招感，无法永远拥有；面对逆境也不必怨天尤人，我们只是在承担自己犯下的过错，又能怨得了谁！正见因缘因果，还可以为未来生命规划出美好的蓝图。我们希望有什么样的未来，现在就该播下什么种子，从因上改造它。

二、自然的回归

只要我们把心事放下
随时都可以在自然的怀抱中体会自在
只要我们把欲望放下
随时都可以在自然的馈赠中获得滋养
只要我们拥有平常心
不必付出任何的代价
就可以享受广阔的天地

人本是大自然的一部分。当自然最奥秘的生命充盈心灵时，足以令我们心旷神怡。所以，让我们的生命回归自然的怀抱！

不知大家注意过没有，世界是个大宇宙，而我们的身体则是个小宇宙。你看，地球的结构和身体是多么相似：地球有江河湖海，就像我们体内奔腾着血液；地球上有岩石，就像我们体内支撑着骨骼；地球表面有泥土，就像我们身上包裹的肌肉；地球上万物茂盛，就像我们身上的毛发。天空时而乌云密布，时而万里晴空，就像我们的心情，变幻着烦恼和欣喜。明媚的阳光就像我们灿烂的笑脸，纷纷的雨雪又像我们悲哀的哭泣。风暴来临时，可以让大树摇摇欲坠，

就像我们发怒时可怕的脾气……我们和自然本是一体，我们的生活也本该和自然息息相关。

人类曾经像动物一样，完全依赖自然给予来维持生存。现代文明在给我们带来诸多便利的同时，也使我们和自然的环境、生活离得越来越远。我们已经无法回到过去，已经丧失在纯粹的自然环境中生存的能力。

房屋的建造，使人类摆脱了最初的穴居时代，拥有更舒适的居住条件。但建筑的不断发展，又将生活在都市的人们禁锢在一片片钢筋水泥的丛林中，禁锢在一片片没有生命的环境中，使树木和草地都成了奢侈的风景。我平时生活在山上，有时从山上走下来，感觉整个城市飘浮着一股躁动不安的气息。

是什么使我们背离自然的生活？是什么使世界的变化如此巨大？是人类的贪欲，是人类对物质盲目的、无止境的追求！我们通过不断占有来满足欲望，占有吃的、占有穿的、占有住的……当我们拥有这一切之后，当我们不再有衣食之忧，不再有“茅屋为秋风所破”的窘境，新的欲望又接踵而至。即使物质生活有

了相当水准，我们还是不会满足，又会产生攀比之心，希望自己拥有的一切超过别人：服饰要比别人讲究，住宅要比别人豪华，地位要比别人显赫……在相互攀比中，衣食住行已经失去最初的实际功用。现代人对生活状况的不满，已不是简单的物质匮乏，而是在攀比中产生的失落感和挫折感。攀比又带来激烈的竞争，使每个人要在竞争的巨大压力下努力适应世界，努力跟上时代飞速前进的步伐，活得特别辛苦。

我总觉得，一味强调经济发展是有副作用的，甚至弊远远大于利。许多人向往日本优越的经济条件，但在我看来，东京是赚钱的天堂，生活的地狱。我到过东京，到处都是高度的喧闹，高度的紧张，路上每个人都行色匆匆，几乎和机器人一样没有表情。我不明白这样活着有什么乐趣可言，原本打算在那里做一两年学术研究，结果一个月就逃了。香港也是经济发展的典范，整个城市就像一座大百货。生活在这钢筋、水泥、噪音组成的闹市中，虽然物质应有尽有，能在最大限度上满足需求，却没有大自然的滋润，很容易让人浮躁而焦虑。

在今天这个社会，科技日新月异，生活方便舒适，世界丰富多彩。物质带来的种种诱惑，时刻都在刺激我们的欲望，让人想要拥有更多、更新、更好的享乐。可我们是否想过，在拥有这一切的同时，又付出了多少代价？

一味追求物欲，使我们必须投入更多时间来赚钱。在能挣会花成为时尚的今天，我们轻易丢弃了几千年来奉行的消费观，开始理直气壮地拜金。那么，我们又是在用什么换取这一切？除了劳动和技术，更需要付出时间。而付出时间就意味着付出生命。在欲望的爆发中，我们已经迷失了自己，不惜把生命耗费在无止境的追求中，甚至没有时间来反省自己，观照自己的精神需求。

一味追求物欲，使人失去了内心的宁静。贪婪制造的妄想，正魔鬼般啃噬着我们毫无防备的心灵。对财富的渴望，使我们看不到欲望下隐藏的巨大陷阱，看不到欲望狰狞的另一面。

一味追求物欲，是引发争斗的根源。在家庭中，因为利益的冲突，导致父母与儿女的争斗，兄弟与姐

妹的争斗，丈夫与妻子的争斗；在社会上，因为利益的冲突，导致家庭与家庭的争斗，公司与公司的争斗，行业与行业的争斗；在国际上，因为利益的冲突，导致地区与地区的争斗，民族与民族的争斗，国家与国家的争斗。一味追求物欲，还是破坏地球环境的罪魁。在短短的百年内，人类以史无前例的规模企图征服自然，对自然资源盲目、过量的开采，使得地球几十亿年形成的财富几乎耗尽了一半。对能源的过量开发，又导致了生态失衡，导致了各种自然灾难和环境污染，同时也给人类生存带来巨大的隐患。

物质和财富是抵达幸福的唯一手段吗？人们在没有事业、财富时，往往会将这些当作幸福的保障。事实上，这只是我们一厢情愿的想法。我在弘法过程中，遇到过一些事业有成者，有着百万、千万甚至上亿的财产，可是他们连人生最基本的快乐都不能正常享有。拥有豪华别墅，却不能安然入眠；面对山珍海味，却食欲全无……在旁人可望而不可即的奢华生活中，他们又何尝体会到幸福的感觉？

人类怎样才能获得幸福？怎样才能活得快乐？首

先，我们要回归自然，学会享受自然的给予。新鲜的空气、纯净的蓝天、迷濛的烟雨、柔和的月光、连绵的青山、潺潺的流水……这一切就在我们周围。大自然的美对每个人都是平等的，愈是自然的东西，就愈接近生命的本质。只要我们把心事放下，随时都可以在自然的怀抱中体会自在；只要我们把欲望放下，随时都可以在自然的馈赠中获得滋养；只要我们拥有平常心，不必付出任何的代价，就可以享受广阔的天地。

“春有百花秋有月，夏有凉风冬有雪。若无闲事挂心头，便是人间好时节。”这是一首告诉我们如何感受自然、拥有良好心态的禅诗。其实，世间最甜美的享受始终是那些最古老的享受。

现代社会的复杂性使生命失去了自由的空间。生活在这种喧闹的环境中，我们的妄想和烦恼空前膨胀着。我们只是劳作，没有闲暇，最终丧失人类应有的灵性，忘了人生之根本。结果得到许多享乐，却并不幸福；拥有许多方便，却并不自由。我们只是在使用生命，却不懂得享受生命！

现代社会的竞争又使人紧张焦虑。回归自然，可

以彻底放松身心。我们不必和自然算计，不必和自然竞争，不必和自然弄虚作假。在大自然中，我们的心灵会变得简单、清净。我们可以在岩石上小憩，让思维停歇，让浑身每一块肌肉、每一个细胞，都彻底放松；我们可以在林间漫步，让念头安住在举手投足的每个当下；我们可以在树下静坐，看花开花落，望云卷云舒。

遗憾的是，我们中的多数人对自然赐予的一切熟视无睹。我们的心中装满事业、家庭、财富……却很少意识到自然中最美好的存在，从来都不懂得去珍惜。尤其在以经济发展为中心的今天，我们为了服从经济利益，不惜破坏人类赖以生存的自然，破坏我们唯一的家园。

新鲜的空气还有多少？城市弥漫着各种废气，连乡村也在日复一日地受到影响；干净的水源还有多少？河流或是混杂着工业废水，或是在气候变迁中逐渐干涸；茂密的森林还有多少？树木的生长远远跟不上人类的滥砍滥伐……如果不能停止对自然的放肆摧残，总有一天，我们会在亲手制造的灾难中首当其冲

地受到制裁。事实上，灾难已初露端倪，到应当警惕的时候了。千百年来，我们一直遵循着天人合一的理念，这才是和自然的相处之道。人类应该感恩大自然，珍惜大自然，爱护大自然，享受大自然，在大自然中寻找快乐，获得宁静。

幸福生活可以从简单中获得。我们用以维持生存的基本所需并不多：食物是为了充饥，服装是为了避寒，房屋是为了休息，交通工具是为了代步。这些需求也不难满足：当我们饥饿的时候，吃什么都有滋味；当我们疲倦的时候，睡在哪里都香甜……

为什么今天的人会有那么多要求？生活中的许多需要，与其说是我们自身的需要，还不如说，是社会使得你有这种需要。现代人的欲望正在工业文明的滋润下，在物质条件的刺激下，无限增长着。一味追求物欲的生活，造成了人类社会的各种烦恼和痛苦。所以，东西方的圣哲们都告诫我们要少欲知足。

一个人追求权力，就会被权力束缚；追求事业，就会被事业障碍；追求财富，就会被财富捆绑……他们没有时间，更没有闲情，他们的所有生命都被用来

作了交换。一旦我们放下这些，既承担起在世间应尽的责任，又不使心执著其间，就能体会到放下的自在，走也方便，睡也安然。我不从政，没有体会过官场的应酬究竟有多累多麻烦，但有时会有信众请我去吃饭，摆出一桌菜，吃了三五样后，根本就分不出各自的味道，每次都吃得我直想睡觉。这种感觉很像在闹市中走了一回，如果用一个词语来形容，就是疲惫不堪。老子说："五色令人目盲，五音令人耳聋，五味令人口爽，驰骋畋猎令人心发狂。"就是告诉我们：复杂的环境会给感官及思维带来混乱。

遵循简单、自然的生活原则，使我们的内心更为单纯。

遵循简单、自然的生活原则，使我们能更好地保护地球有限的资源。

遵循简单、自然的生活原则，使我们不必将所有时间用来为满足物欲而奔忙，享有生命的闲暇。

遵循简单、自然的生活原则，使人与人之间可以和平相处，减少由激烈竞争带来的犯罪现象，乃至各种战争。

三、自我的回归

所谓的我
其实是由许多非我的东西组成
而这些非我的东西
哪一样都不能代表真正的我
如果我们把它们当成我的话
人生就会充满烦恼

自我的回归，使我们的人格回归生命的本来。

自我，大家似乎非常熟悉。每个人都生活在强烈的自我意识中，一生都在为所谓的“我”而奔忙。为了我的事业、我的家庭、我的儿女、我的名誉地位、我的财富……我们所关注的一切，都是围绕自我这个中心。在每个人的心中：我，有着神圣的地位，有着至高无上的权力。

在人类社会的发展过程中，正是因为我执的关系，才导致私有制的产生，乃至一切不平等现象。因为我执，人类不但对我有着深深的贪恋，还进一步希望更多的东西为我所有。在家庭中，一方面体现在父母对子女的专制，尤其在中国，根深蒂固的家族观念，使

父母往往把子女当作自己的一部分，当作私有财产般任意处置，固执地以自己的观念和生活方式要求子女，无视子女的独立人格，使他们活得痛苦不堪。一方面又体现在夫妻间的过分占有，男女地位的不平等，使妇女在很长时间内只是男性社会的附庸，彼此活得很不自由。

我执，使人与人之间产生严重的隔阂，是造成人类不平等的根源。我执，引发人生的种种烦恼，又是社会犯罪的祸根。我们每天何止百次千次说到我，然而，究竟什么是真正的我？在生活中，我们有身外之物，有身内之物。身外之物，包括我们的事业、名誉、地位，包括我们的信用卡、房子、汽车，还包括我们的妻子、儿女、朋友，以及诸如此类的一切。我们时常将它们作为生活的尺度和成功的标准，将它们和我混淆在一起，不分彼此。

在生活中可以发现这样的例子：若事业成功，便觉得高人一等，而职业低贱，又会自惭形秽；若家资巨万，便觉得趾高气扬，而身无分文，又会无脸见人……事实上，稍微清醒一些的人都会知道，这些东

西只是暂时为我所有，它们中的每一样都逃脱不了无常的规律。我们的名誉地位，无法永远保有；我们的信用卡、房子、汽车，随时都会更换主人；即便是我们的妻子儿女，也可能在聚散离合中变换相互的关系。由此可知，这些身外之物并不能代表真正的我，我们只是出于错觉，才把它们当成是我的一部分。

那么，我们的身内之物，这个生命体总该是我的吧？通常，每个人最关心的就是自己的身体。当我们为他人付出一些劳动，总会计较报酬，计较得失。可一生几十年的光阴，都在为我们的色身服务，忙它的衣食，忙它的成长，却无怨无悔。这样看来，色身似乎理所当然地代表着真正的我了。可我们再分析一下，就会发现，色身也不过是四大的假合。现在医学发达，人身上的许多器官都可以像机器零件一样随时更换。当你的腿断了，可以换上义肢；当你的心脏有了问题，可以换上合成材料制作的人工心脏；甚至换头也不再是神话，不久的将来，人就可能在自己肩上摸到另一个头，那个头到底是不是你呢？而且，色身每天都处在不断的新陈代谢中。从婴儿到少年、成年，每一天

都在成长，然后又开始逐渐地衰老、败坏。我们的色身，又有哪一刻不在变化中？肉食的人，组成色身的原材料，是动物的肉；素食的人，组成色身的原材料，是蔬菜和瓜果。所以在动物界，肉食动物的性格都比较凶暴，而素食动物则相对温和许多。色身有如住房，只供我们暂时住一住，我们无法永远拥有它，更无法让房子永远不败坏。生命只在呼吸间，当我们还有一口气在，可以很活泼，很灿烂；倘若哪天一口气不来，就该腐烂发臭了。可见，色身也不能代表真正的我。

再来看一下我们的精神活动。精神领域是一个错综复杂的世界，不会比庞大的政府机构简单。在色身成长的岁月中，精神领域也不断得到充实。就我自己的人生经验来说，我的观念和知识，离不开小时候父母的教诲，上学后老师的教育，以及走上弘法道路后社会给予的影响。我现在的所思所想，都是长期以来一点一滴形成的。尽管我们每天都会不断表述：我的想法！我的看法！不时发表一些高论。但我们注意一下就会发现，在人生每个阶段，想法和看法并非一成不变的，而是随着阅历的丰富和知识的增长，逐渐发

生改变。尽管我们每天都会不断强调：我喜欢，我讨厌；我快乐，我痛苦……我喜欢的时候，对方的缺点也是优点；我讨厌的时候，对方的优点也成了缺点。我快乐的时候，浑身每个细胞都在笑个不停；我痛苦的时候，日月星辰也显得暗淡无光。痛苦时的我，无法想象快乐时的我；快乐时的我，同样无法想象痛苦时的我。那么，究竟是痛苦时的我代表真正的我，还是快乐时的我代表真正的我呢？

我，究竟是什么？从以上分析，我们了解到，所谓的我其实是由许多非我的东西组成。而这些非我的东西，哪一样都不能代表真正的我。如果我们把它们当成我的话，人生就会充满烦恼。

我们要用缘起的智慧观照人生，充分认识到，财富、地位、家庭、事业、名誉及世间的一切，甚至包括我们的色身，都是无常变幻的。我们不可能永远拥有，更不能将它们当作真正的我。如果我们认识到这一点，就能减少对世间万物的执著，让心从物欲中解脱出来，再也不被它们左右，不为它们要死要活，从而保有心态的超然，人格的独立。

我们也要用缘起的智慧观照心念。在我们的内心，有种种不同的想法和情绪。有人说世道险恶，但我觉得人心更险恶。说到人心时，大家想到的可能只是他人的心，但我指的是每个人自己的心。我们的心中有无数陷阱：贪婪的陷阱、嗔恚的陷阱、自私的陷阱、怀疑的陷阱、骄傲的陷阱、嫉妒的陷阱、欲望的陷阱、愚痴的陷阱及不良嗜好的陷阱……如果没有智慧观照，心就会时常落入这些陷阱，让贪婪、嗔恚、猜疑、骄傲、嫉妒和欲望支配着我们。如果没有智慧观照，心就会沉迷在这些陷阱中不自知，把眼前的一点小利当作生活的全部，被当下的一点情绪主宰我们的心灵。

如果没有智慧观照，我们就会缺乏辨别真相的能力，不能透过现象看到事物的本质，把这些原本非我的东西当成是我，造成无尽的烦恼和痛苦。我执，是世间一切痛苦的根源，一切烦恼的根源，一切灾难的根源，一切犯罪现象的根源……只有通达无我，才能消除由此而来的一切过患。

通达无我的真理，我们就能更好地把握心念。对

每种想法的产生都能清清楚楚，对每种情绪的出现都能明明白白，就不会心甘情愿地做它们的奴隶。

通达无我的真理，我们就能正确地认识生命。不再盲目地执著身内或身外之物为我，不被世间的无常变化所困扰。

通达无我的真理，我们才能开发本自具足的智慧，找到本自具足的佛性。

自我的回归，让我们回归生命的本来！







Returning to the Essence of Life

Master Jiqun

Translated by MPI Translation Center

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Today, I'd like to talk to you about *Returning to the Essence of Life.*

Life blossoms in every corner our eyes can see, filling the world with vitality and allowing human society to live and thrive. Broadly speaking, not only do all living beings in nature embody the power of life, but even stars and entire galaxies experience their own processes of formation, development, and eventual dissolution.

Among all forms of life, human life is undoubtedly the one we are most deeply connected to and care about the

most. Simply put, human life is the journey we experience from birth to death, consisting of three aspects: living, birth and death, and the true essence of life.

People usually care most about their living, which involves two levels: earning enough for basic survival and improving the quality of life.

To be alive, we must first solve the problem of survival. As the old saying goes, "Food is the first necessity of man"—our body cannot function properly without the energy provided by food. Beyond this fundamental need, we also need to take care of household expenses every day. Some people enjoy great blessings—they are born into wealthy families, with good fortune from birth. Especially in Chinese culture, parents often strive to accumulate wealth for their children, hoping they will never have to struggle for survival throughout their lives.

However, in some developed countries where social welfare systems are well established, basic survival may not

seem like a major concern. Yet around the world, many people spend their entire lives struggling just to survive. They go to work day after day, tirelessly laboring just to earn their daily bread and support their families. Their purpose in living is very simple—so simple that it can be summed up in a single word: survival.

In fact, animals in nature—birds in the sky, fish in the sea, and beasts on the land—also struggle to survive, wandering about in search of food to satisfy their hunger, just like humans do. If we live solely for survival, how are we any different from animals? For every living being, survival is indispensable. But only human beings, after resolving the problem of survival, go on to pursue a higher quality of life.

Today, as hedonism prevails, almost everyone focuses on improving material conditions. Yet in reality, the benefits that material comfort can bring us are far less beneficial than we often imagine. As a result, more introspective people have begun turning toward spiritual pursuits,

aiming to elevate the quality of their life—a life of art, a life of religion. We can say that spiritual life, rooted in self-transcendence, is unique to humans, and sets us apart from all other creatures in the natural world.

Apart from the everyday issues that we all care about, generations of philosophers and religious scholars have spent thousands of years exploring the questions of birth and death. Birth and death, the two attributes that accompany every human being, negate each other and yet are inseparable.

If we take a person's birth as the starting point of life's journey, then from the moment they enter this world, they are, with every passing moment, moving closer to its end. It is precisely because we are born that death becomes inevitable. As a philosopher once said: every experience of life moves toward death; this is its very nature.

So, where does life come from, and where does death lead? According to materialists, life comes from one's parents.

Our bodies—every part of skin and hair—are gifts from them; when our mother gives birth to us, we come into being. The end of life, then, means the disappearance of everything, like a lamp being extinguished. Death, as the end of an individual's life, reveals the finite nature of human life.

However, most religions believe that a person possesses not only a physical body but also an independent soul. The body, bound by time, inevitably ages and decays, and will ultimately fade away. Yet the soul—transcending the body—is believed to be immortal and to continue its journey in another world. The Christian faith, for example, is built upon the hope of eternal life. Through divine salvation, the limited secular life is granted a new, everlasting life by sharing in God's own life. In their devout prayers, death is seen as a gateway to heaven, marking the beginning of a new life.

Materialists believe that life arises from matter; when the body disintegrates, the spirit also comes to an end.

This is an annihilationist view, which holds that life ends with death and that every being has only a single, present lifetime. Yet we should realize that science, though powerful in exploring and transforming the external world, remains limited in its understanding of the essence of life. In contrast, religious thinkers believe that every being has both present and future lifetimes, and possesses an independent and unchanging soul. However, this belief falls into the opposite extreme—the view of permanence—and is also not the ultimate truth.

The Buddha, through the wisdom of dependent origination, observed the phenomena of life and taught that life extends through the past, present, and future. Life is a continuous flow of similar yet ever-changing states—neither permanent nor utterly ceasing. It includes not only the present, but also an endless past and an infinite future. It is like a river, flowing from the beginningless past into the endless future; it is also like an iron chain, with each link seamlessly connected to the next. Our present lifetime is only a single wave in the vast ocean, a

single link in the endless chain.

From a materialist perspective, human life is indeed fleeting. However, when we understand life through the wisdom of the Buddha's teachings, we come to see that a person does not truly "die." What we call death is merely the close of a phase of life, a transformation in the form of life. At the same time, it marks the beginning of a new phase. As practitioners of Buddhism, we should not only care about happiness in this present life, but also about the direction of our future lives. Out of his compassion for all life, the Buddha, after attaining enlightenment, expounded to the beings of the Saha World the principles of happiness in this life, happiness in future lives, and the ultimate bliss of Nirvana.

Living is the manifestation of life, while birth and death mark the beginning and end of a phase of life. Yet the most essential aspect in human life is not living, nor even birth and death, but the essence of life itself. To transform our destiny, we must first understand—what is the

ultimate nature of life?

A poet says, "Life is a sacred mystery, a secret law."

A biologist says, "Life is protein; it is amino acids."

According to the Dharma, these interpretations are incomplete. As the most spiritually endowed among all beings, we must use wisdom to unlock the mysteries of life. Only through this wisdom can we better understand and make use of this present life, rather than turning away from this life in ignorance or blind reverence.

Life consists of two major systems: the material and the spiritual. The material system refers to our physical body, made up of the elements identified by biologists. Our bodies come from our parents, carrying their genetic inheritance. Yet, the spiritual system is independent, with its own kind of inherited information—the karmic seeds stored in the Alaya consciousness since beginningless time. In everyday life, we often see that children of

the same parents have very different characters and talents. Why is this so? It is because each being enters the world carrying their own unique stream of karmic information, with different starting points.

I often say that practicing Buddhism is, in the truest sense, a life engineering project. It can help us move from imperfection to perfection, from affliction and suffering to liberation and freedom, and from understanding life to fundamentally transforming it. Once we understand what life truly is, and recognize the importance of transforming it, we can begin to discuss "Returning to the Essence of Life." I'd like to illustrate this from three aspects.

I

Returning to Right View

Beyond the basic material conditions for survival, what most directly shapes our lives is our view of life. Whatever we think, do, or say is inseparable from the influence of our views. Our views and actions support and reinforce each other. On the one hand, our views guide our actions and shape our choices; on the other hand, our actions in turn influence and transform our views. In a sense, growing up is a journey of coming to understand life and the world.

Unfortunately, most people often hold wrong views. This is because our views arise from perception, and

perception itself is built on our senses. We tend to trust our own senses, taking what we see, hear, and perceive as the only reality. But are our senses truly reliable? In fact, our senses are far from reliable.

First of all, our senses are far from sharp. In a noisy environment, faint sounds are easily drowned out, making it nearly impossible for us to hear them clearly or even be aware of them. If this is the case for hearing, what about our sight? In darkness, even the brightest colors and the most beautiful landscapes become meaningless. Without the help of scientific instruments, the range of our perception is extremely narrow: things that are too small require a microscope, and those too distant require a telescope.

We all know the story of the blind men and the elephant. In a sense, we are not so different from the blind men. When we rely solely on our senses, we perceive just tiny fragments of the vast world, unaware of the greater whole and the deeper truth behind appearances. Without

realizing this, we cling to our limited understanding of the world, so how accurate can our views really be?

Second, our senses can easily deceive us. Since ancient times, people have believed that the moon waxes and wanes, yet in fact, the moon itself never undergoes such changes. The Earth is constantly rotating—"travelling eighty thousand *li* (about 40,000 kilometers) a day"—but we can't feel it at all. For centuries, people regarded Earth as the center of the universe. It was not until the sixteenth century that Copernicus first proposed that the Earth actually revolves around the Sun. In his time, this discovery was shocking—many even saw it as heresy. We can imagine that if our understanding remained at that level, it would be hard for us to accept a fact so completely contrary to what our senses tell us.

The stars in the sky look so small that we could almost hold them in our hands. Yet astronomers tell us that many of them are far larger than the Earth. Some of these stars, by the time we see their light, have already vanished,

because it takes thousands or even tens of thousands of years for their light to reach our eyes. When we sit in a boat, we may feel that the mountains on both shores are slowly drifting by, but in fact they are still; it is the movement of the boat that creates the illusion. And when we place a pen in water and see it appear bent, it is simply the refraction of light that deceives our eyes.

So, can science really correct the distortions of our senses? Today, many people place great faith in science and regard it as the standard for verifying truth. Yet over the past few centuries, as science has continued to advance, each era has established its own scientific theories. Some scientific conclusions that once seemed to be true have been continuously challenged and eventually overturned. This shows that when it comes to understanding the world, our senses are indeed unreliable, and science, still developing, is not the absolute truth either.

Our understanding of the world is also influenced by our emotions. When we like someone, we tend to perceive their

flaws as strengths; but when we dislike someone, we often interpret their strengths as flaws. When we are in a good mood, everything around us seems extraordinarily beautiful: the sunlight shines brighter, the sky looks clearer, the trees nod at us, the flowers seem to smile at us, the birds sing for us, and the butterflies dance for us. The world is brimming with vibrant life everywhere. Yet when we are weighed down by negative emotions, the very same world loses its color and seems shrouded in a gray haze.

Family bonds and blood ties also give our perceptions a deep emotional tint. In the eyes of parents, their own child always seems especially important, constantly tugging at their hearts. Yet to those who are not related, that same child is no different from the countless others—perhaps even insignificant. Similarly, lovers deeply in love see each other as precious as life itself; every word or gesture from the other can bring immense joy or deep hurt. Yet to bystanders, such love is but a fleeting episode in the colorful tapestry of the world.

Our senses and emotions make it hard for us to perceive the world as it truly is. Among these distorted perceptions, one of the most common mistakes is confusing names with realities. Everything has both a name and a reality. Take a table, for example: there are the physical materials that make up the table, and there is the name "table" that we use to define it. But are the name and the reality the same thing? In fact, a name is merely a conventional designation, a symbol that helps us recognize and distinguish things. Yet we often fail to realize this, taking the name for the reality itself. In this way, our clinging to names often brings us unnecessary suffering.

In everyday life, which name matters to us the most? Our own. In fact, a name is merely a label given to us by our parents—like "Number One" or "Number Two"—without any inherent self-nature. Yet once we are given this label, we become attached to it as "me." Whenever we hear our name, our ears immediately perk up: Are they talking about me? What are they saying? If we hear praise or flattery, we feel happy; if we hear slander or insults, we

feel hurt.

Our attachment to our name makes it difficult for us to bear any verbal offense. If someone calls us a donkey, a pig, or a fool, we may become furious, feeling as though our dignity has been insulted. But in reality, "donkey," "pig," or "fool" are nothing but empty labels. If you were to say "You are a donkey" to someone who does not understand your language, they would not even know what you meant—let alone feel offended.

Misperceptions also make us take appearances for reality. From the Buddhist perspective, everything is a temporary form that arises from conditions. Take, for example, the table in front of us: it is merely a combination of materials—wood, nails, human labor, and so forth. These non-table conditions come together to create a useful object. For convenience, people in the past gave it the name "table." But if one of these conditions were to disappear, the table itself would cease to exist as well. This shows that the table is not an independently existing, unchanging

entity, nor was it inherently meant to be called a table. The name is simply a convention that has been passed down over time. If people in the past had decided to call it a "monster," then every table we see today would be a "monster," and that word would sound completely normal—no one would react with fear or surprise. What is true of the table is equally true of all things.

The *Diamond Sutra* teaches: "All conditioned phenomena are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow; like dew or a flash of lightning; thus should one view them." Everything that exists is a provisional appearance arising from conditions, without any independent, unchanging, or self-determining essence. If we can contemplate everything we encounter in this way, we will not become attached to them, or be disturbed by their changes. In other words, we are no longer controlled or carried away by the circumstances around us.

Another common misunderstanding about life is our expectation of permanence. We constantly wish that

everything connected with us could last forever—our lives, our careers, our wealth, our families, and our relationships. Yet, everything in the world is impermanent and constantly changing. If we fail to see this truth and cannot let go of our desire for permanence, we will inevitably suffer.

When we expect our wealth to last forever, we cannot accept the collapse of a company. When we expect our family to stay whole forever, we are crushed by its breakup. When we expect friendships never to fade, we are hurt by distance. When we expect love to remain unchanged, we are wounded by betrayal. Change is happening at every moment. If we cannot accept it, we will fall into suffering and repeat one tragedy after another.

Therefore, to transform our lives, we must first transform our understanding by establishing a right view of life. Western philosophy, from its early inquiries into the cosmic essence in ancient Greece to its shift toward epistemology after the sixteenth century, reflects the crucial role of understanding capacity. The way we

understand the world determines the world we see and the life we live.

Let our understanding return to the reality of the world! At every moment, may we see things as they truly are—not deceived by false appearances, untouched by emotions, and undisturbed by any external factors. Just as there are five apples on the table, we perceive exactly five apples—neither more nor less. The same applies to our understanding of living, birth and death, and the essence of life itself.

How can we see everything as it truly is and establish the right views? This cannot be achieved without the wisdom of the Dharma. Even today, across different faiths, the Buddha is widely regarded as one of the greatest thinkers in human history. As the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss once remarked: "What, after all, do I truly understand—from the writings of masters or philosophers I have read, from the societies I have thoroughly studied, and from the so-called sciences in which the West takes such

pride? Even if I were to gather them all together, they would amount to no more than a few scattered phrases; they cannot compare with the wisdom of the sage who once meditated beneath the Bodhi tree."

Such wisdom is attained through practice; it reveals the true nature of life and the universe. It never grows outdated with the passing of time, but continues to offer practical guidance for our lives today. According to the Dharma, all delusions arise from beings' ignorance—the root of wrong views, as well as the source of afflictions, suffering, and even crime. Thus, spiritual practice must begin with establishing the right view. From the Three Stages of Listening, Contemplation, and Practice, to the Four Dharma Practices and the Noble Eightfold Path—all are founded upon the right view.

By understanding the right view of impermanence, we can free ourselves from the attachment to permanence. People always live under the illusion of permanence, wishing that everything around them would never leave

or change. Yet in reality, everything is impermanent. When life doesn't go as we wish, suffering naturally arises. When we truly understand impermanence, we can face every change—whether hardship or ease, failure or success—with calm acceptance. This is because all these changes are temporary and ever-changing, following the cycle of arising, abiding, decaying, and ceasing.

Understanding the right view of no-self, we can free ourselves from the afflictions arising from self-attachment. This self-attachment is the root of greed, hatred, and delusion, leading to countless unwholesome actions, such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and false speech. Only with the right view of no-self can we eliminate suffering at its very root.

By understanding the right view of "causes, conditions, and effects," we can avoid seeing things in a subjective, partial, or narrow way. This enables us to see the world as it is and handle all matters with skillful means. With this right view, we can face all favorable and unfavorable

circumstances calmly. When life is going well, there is no need for pride or self-satisfaction, for such good fortune simply arises from wholesome causes sown in the past and cannot last forever. When adversity comes, there is no need to blame others or complain about fate, for we are simply bearing the results of our own past mistakes—who else could we blame? Moreover, when we have the right view of "causes, conditions, and effects," we can craft a beautiful blueprint for our future lives. The future we hope for depends on the seeds we sow now; to change our future, we must begin by transforming the causes we create now.

II

Returning to Nature

Human beings are an integral part of nature. When the profound vitality of nature fills our hearts, it can bring a deep sense of peace and joy. Therefore, let our lives return to the embrace of nature!

Have you ever noticed that the world is a vast universe, while our body is a small universe? Look closely—how similar the Earth's structure is to our own: its rivers, lakes, and seas are like the blood that flows within us; its rocks are like the bones that support our frame; its soil, like the flesh that envelops our bodies; and its flourishing vegetation, like the hair that covers our bodies. The

sky, shrouded in clouds at times and clear and bright at other times, reflects our changing moods of sorrow and joy. The brilliant sunlight is like our radiant smiles, while the falling rain and snow echo our sorrowful tears. When storms arise and cause great trees to sway and tremble, they mirror the tempestuous anger that sometimes surges within us. In fact, we are one with nature, and our lives are meant to be intimately connected with the rhythms of the natural world.

Human beings once lived like other animals, relying entirely on nature's gifts for survival. While modern civilization has brought us countless conveniences, it has also led us further and further away from the natural environment and from the way of life it sustains. We can no longer return to the past, for we have lost the ability to survive within a purely natural environment.

Building houses freed humanity from the primitive age of cave dwelling, and provided more comfortable living conditions. However, as architecture advanced, it also

trapped urban dwellers within jungles of steel and concrete—lifeless environments where trees and grass have become rare luxuries. I usually live in the mountains, and when I go to the city, I can feel a restless, uneasy atmosphere hanging in the air.

What has led us away from a life in harmony with nature? What has caused such tremendous changes in the world? It is human greed—the blind and insatiable pursuit of material possessions. We try to satisfy our desires by constantly acquiring more food, clothing, and shelter. Once we have all these—when we no longer worry about basic needs, or fear that our "thatched hut might be broken by the autumn wind,"—new desires immediately arise. Even when our material lives reach a comfortable level, we remain dissatisfied. We are driven by the urge to compare ourselves to others: striving for finer clothing, more luxurious homes, and greater social status.

In this ceaseless cycle of comparison, the original purpose of food, clothing, shelter, and transportation has been

lost. People today are dissatisfied not because of material shortage, but because of the discontent and frustration born of constant comparison. This comparison, in turn, fuels fierce competition, forcing everyone to struggle under immense pressure to keep pace with the rapidly changing world—leaving many exhausted.

I believe that placing too much emphasis on economic development brings serious side effects—often with the harm far outweighing the benefits. Many people admire Japan for its strong economy, but to me, Tokyo is a paradise for making money, but a hell for living. When I visited Tokyo, I found it filled with overwhelming noise and tension. On the streets, everyone seemed to be in a hurry, with emotionless faces, like robots. I could not understand what joy could be found in living such a life. Although I planned to stay there for a year or two to do academic research, I left after just one month. Hong Kong, another example of economic success, feels like one vast department store. "Living in this jungle of steel, concrete, and constant noise, where material desires are

fully satisfied, but nature is missing, people easily become restless and anxious."

In today's world, technology is advancing at a breathtaking pace, making life ever more convenient and comfortable, and the world more colorful and diverse. Yet the temptations brought by material abundance constantly stimulate our desires, driving us to seek more, newer, and better forms of pleasure. But have we ever stopped to reflect on this: while enjoying all these pleasures, what price have we paid?

Relentlessly pursuing material desires forces us to spend even more time earning money. In today's world, where "earning more and spending more" has become fashionable, we have easily cast aside the age-old virtue of frugality and now embrace a culture of materialism as if it were the natural way of life. But what exactly are we giving up in return? Beyond labor and skill, we are spending our time, and to spend time is, in essence, to spend life itself. In the surge of desire, we have lost ourselves. We spend our lives

chasing endlessly, with almost no time left to stop, reflect, or care for our inner spirit.

Relentlessly pursuing material desires steals away our inner peace. Delusions born of greed gnaw at our unguarded hearts like demons. Our craving for wealth blinds us to the great traps hidden beneath our desires and to the dark, twisted face of craving itself.

Relentlessly pursuing material desires is the root cause of conflict. Within families, conflicts arise between parents and children, brothers and sisters, and husbands and wives—all driven by clashes of interests. In society, similar conflicts erupt among families, companies, and industries. On the international stage, they spark disputes between regions, ethnic groups, and nations. Relentlessly pursuing material desires is also the primary culprit in the destruction of our planet. In only a century, humanity has sought to conquer nature on an unprecedented scale, recklessly exploiting natural resources that took billions of years to form, and depleting nearly half of them. The

excessive development of energy resources has led to ecological imbalance, triggering natural disasters and environmental pollution, and posing profound threats to the survival of humanity.

Are material possessions and wealth the only path to happiness? People without career success or financial abundance often see them as guarantees of happiness. In fact, this is merely wishful thinking. During my years of sharing the Dharma, I have met many people who are highly successful in business, possessing fortunes worth millions or even billions. Yet many of them are unable to enjoy even the simplest pleasures of life. They possess luxurious villas, yet find themselves unable to fall asleep peacefully; they are presented with the finest delicacies, yet feel no appetite at all. Amid a life of luxury that others can only dream of, have they ever truly experienced a genuine sense of happiness?

How can human beings attain happiness? How can we live a joyful life? First, we must return to nature and learn

to enjoy what it offers. Fresh air, pure blue skies, misty rain, gentle moonlight, rolling green mountains, murmuring streams—all these blessings are around us. The beauty of nature is equal for everyone, and the more natural a thing is, the closer it is to the essence of life. As long as we set aside our worries, we can feel at ease in nature's embrace at any moment; as long as we let go of our desires, we can be nourished by nature's gifts at any time; as long as we keep a calm and simple mind, we can enjoy the vast world freely without paying any price.

"In spring, there are a hundred blossoms; in autumn, the full moon. In summer, a refreshing breeze; in winter, the falling snow. If no trivial matters burden your mind, every season is the best season in life." This Chan poem teaches us how to attune ourselves to nature and to cultivate a serene state of mind. Indeed, the sweetest joy in life has always been the simplest and most timeless.

The complexity of modern society has deprived life of its freedom. Living in such a noisy environment, our

delusions and afflictions have expanded as never before. We work endlessly, with no real time for leisure, and gradually lose the spiritual vitality inherent in human nature, forgetting the very essence of life. As a result, we enjoy many pleasures, yet do not feel happiness; we possess many conveniences, yet are not truly free. We are merely using up our lives, without knowing how to truly live them.

The competition of modern society breeds tension and anxiety. Returning to nature allows us to fully relax both body and mind. We do not have to weigh gains and losses against nature, compete with it, or deceive it. Amidst the natural world, our hearts become simple and pure. We can rest upon a rock, letting our thoughts grow still, and allowing every muscle and every cell in our body to fully relax. We can stroll through the forest, anchoring our awareness in the simple movements of each step and gesture. We can sit quietly beneath a tree, watching flowers bloom and fade, observing clouds gather and drift away.

Regrettably, most of us overlook the gifts of nature. Our minds are filled with concerns about career, family, and wealth, leaving little space to notice the most beautiful presences within nature, nor have we ever truly learned to cherish them. Especially in today's economy-driven world, we often sacrifice nature for the sake of economic interests, carelessly destroying the very environment that sustains us—our only true home.

How much fresh air remains? Cities are shrouded in various forms of pollution, and even the countryside is increasingly affected day by day. How much clean water is left? Rivers are either polluted by industrial waste or gradually drying up as the climate changes. How many lush forests still survive? The growth of trees lags far behind humanity's rampant deforestation. If we do not cease our reckless destruction of nature, the day will surely come when we will become the first victims of the disasters we have created. In fact, the signs of disaster are already emerging, and it is time to awaken to the danger. For thousands of years, humanity has upheld the

principle of harmony between nature and humanity—this is the true way to coexist with nature. We must learn to be grateful for nature, cherish it, protect it, delight in its beauty, and find joy and peace within its embrace.

A happy life can be obtained through simple living. The basic things we need to live are few: food to ease our hunger, clothing to keep us warm, a home for rest, and transportation to get us where we need to go. These needs are not difficult to fulfill. When we are hungry, everything we eat tastes delicious; when we are tired, we can sleep soundly anywhere.

Why do people today have so many demands? Many of the things we think we need are not truly our own needs, but rather what society has taught us to want. Today, people's desires are growing without limit—nourished by industrial civilization and stimulated by material conditions. A life driven by the endless pursuit of material possessions inevitably breeds countless forms of suffering and affliction. That is why sages, from both East and

West, have long advised us to reduce our desires and learn contentment.

If we pursue power, we become bound by it; if we pursue career success, we become hindered by it; if we pursue wealth, we become shackled by it. We have neither time nor leisure—our entire lives are spent in endless exchanges. Yet once we learn to let go—fulfilling our worldly responsibilities without clinging to them—we can experience freedom of letting go: walking with ease, sleeping in peace.

I have never entered politics, so I cannot truly imagine how exhausting and complicated official social engagements must be. But sometimes, when lay followers invite me to a meal and set out a full table of dishes, after tasting only a few, I can no longer tell one flavor from another, and soon begin to feel drowsy. This feeling is much like walking through a bustling marketplace. If I were to describe the feeling in one word, it would be "exhausting." As Laozi once said, "Too many colors blind the eyes;

too many sounds deafen the ears; too many flavors dull the taste; hunting makes the heart go wild." This ancient wisdom reminds us that an overly complex environment brings confusion to both our senses and our minds.

By living simply and naturally, we cultivate a purer heart.

By living simply and naturally, we can better protect the Earth's limited resources.

By living simply and naturally, we do not have to spend all our time rushing to satisfy material desires, but can enjoy the leisure that life offers.

By living simply and naturally, we foster peaceful coexistence among people and reduce the crimes caused by intense competition, and even prevent various wars.

III

Returning to the True Self

Returning to the true self means bringing our character back to the original nature of life.

The self is something that we all believe we know well. Each of us lives deeply immersed in a strong sense of self, spending our entire lives busily striving for this self—for my career, my family, my children, my reputation and status, my wealth. Everything we care about revolves around this self. In each person's heart, the self holds a sacred position and has supreme authority.

Throughout human social development, it is precisely the

attachment to the self that has given rise to private ownership and, ultimately, all forms of inequality. Because of this self-attachment, human beings not only cling deeply to this self, but also crave to possess more and more things as "mine." For example, within families, this self-attachment takes several forms. On the one hand, it appears as parental authoritarianism. Especially in China, people have deeply rooted family values that parents often see their children as extensions of themselves, or even as their private property. They impose their own ideas and ways of life upon their children, ignoring the children's individuality and independence. As a result, the children often suffer greatly. On the other hand, self-attachment also reveals itself as excessive possessiveness between spouses. For a long time, inequality between men and women meant that women were treated merely as dependents in a male-dominated society. As a result, neither side could experience genuine freedom within the relationship.

Self-attachment creates deep barriers between people and is the root cause of human inequality. It gives rise to

countless afflictions in life and serves as a fundamental source of social crime. We speak of "I" countless times each day—yet what, truly, is this "self"? In our lives, there are external possessions and inner qualities. External possessions include our careers, reputations, and social status, as well as our credit cards, houses, cars, and even our spouses, children, friends, and so on. We often take these external things as the measure of our lives and the standard of our success, blurring the line between them and the true self.

In life, we often see such examples: if one's career is successful, one feels superior; if one's occupation is humble, one feels inferior. If one possesses great wealth, one feels proud and arrogant; if penniless, one feels too embarrassed to face others. Yet it becomes clear that all these things are only temporarily "mine," and none of them can escape the law of impermanence. Our reputation and social status cannot be held forever; our credit cards, houses, and cars may change ownership at any time; even our spouses and children may see their relationships with us change

through the gatherings and separations. It becomes clear, then, that these external possessions do not represent the true self. Only through misperception do we mistake them for part of "me."

Then, could this physical body itself be considered the true self? Normally, everyone cares most about their own bodies. When we work for others, we often count rewards and losses. Yet, for decades, we spend our lives serving our physical body—feeding it, clothing it, nurturing its growth—without complaint or regret. At first glance, it seems that the body naturally represents the true self. But upon deeper reflection, we realize that this body is nothing more than a temporary combination of the four elements—earth, water, fire, and air.

With modern medical advances, many parts of the body can now be replaced like mechanical parts; if a leg is broken, it can be fitted with a prosthetic; if the heart fails, it can be replaced with an artificial one made of synthetic materials. Even head transplants are no longer a fantasy.

Perhaps in the near future, a person might have another head upon their shoulders. But then, would that head still be "you"?

Furthermore, the body is in constant change—growing, aging, and decaying. From infancy to youth, to adulthood, it is transforming every moment. For meat eaters, the raw materials that make up the body come from animal flesh; for vegetarians, from plants and fruits. Perhaps that is why carnivorous animals tend to be more aggressive, while herbivores are relatively gentle.

Thus, the body is akin to a temporary house—a place we live in for a while, but can never truly own, or keep from falling into decay. Life itself depends on a single breath: as long as breath persists, we are lively and radiant; once it ceases, the body quickly decays. Clearly, then, the physical body cannot represent the true self.

Now, let us turn to our mental activities. The realm of the mind is complex and intricate, no simpler than a

vast governmental organization. As the physical body grows and matures, the mind too becomes enriched and developed. Speaking from my own life experience, my thoughts and knowledge have been shaped by my parents' teachings during childhood, by my teachers' guidance at school, and by the influence of society after I embarked on the path of spreading the Dharma. Everything I think and believe today has been gradually formed, bit by bit, over a long period of time.

Although we often say every day, "my thoughts, my opinions," and sometimes express some lofty ideas, we notice that at each stage of life, our thoughts and opinions are not fixed. They keep evolving as our experience deepens and our knowledge expands. Even as we keep saying, "I like this, I dislike that; I am happy, I am sad," our perceptions shift along with our state of mind. When we like someone, even their faults appear as virtues; when we dislike someone, even their virtues become faults. When we are joyful, every cell in our body seems to smile; when we suffer, even the sun, moon, and stars appear dim. The

self in suffering cannot imagine the self in joy, and the self in joy cannot imagine the self in suffering either. So, which truly represents the true self—the self in suffering, or the self in joy?

What exactly is the "self"? From the above analysis, we can see that what we call the "self" is actually made up of many non-self elements. None of these non-self elements can represent the true self. If we mistake them for the true self, our lives will be clouded by afflictions.

We should contemplate life through the wisdom of dependent origination. By doing so, we can clearly see that wealth, status, family, career, reputation, and all worldly phenomena—even our physical body—are impermanent and ever-changing. We cannot possess them forever, nor can we take them as our true selves. When we understand this, our attachment to worldly things naturally lessens. Our mind becomes free from material desires, no longer controlled by them. In this way, we can maintain inner transcendence and independence.

We should also observe our thoughts with the wisdom of dependent origination. Within our minds arise countless thoughts and emotions. Some say the world is dangerous, but I believe the human mind is even more perilous. When we speak of the mind, we often think only of others' minds, but here, I mean our own. Within each of us lie countless traps: greed, anger, selfishness, doubt, arrogance, jealousy, desire, ignorance, and unhealthy habits. Without wisdom, our minds easily fall into these traps, allowing greed, hatred, suspicion, pride, jealousy, and desire to control us. Without the wisdom to observe these emotions, we become trapped by them without even knowing it—mistaking small, fleeting gains for the whole of life and letting passing emotions dominate our minds.

Without the wisdom to observe clearly, we lose the ability to discern truth. We can no longer see through appearances to perceive the true nature of things. As a result, we mistake what is not the true self for the true self, giving rise to endless afflictions and suffering. Attachment to the

self is the root of all suffering in the world, the source of all afflictions, the origin of all disasters, and the cause behind all crimes. Only by realizing the truth of no-self can we eliminate all the suffering that arises from this attachment.

By realizing the truth of no-self, we gain better mastery over our thoughts. When we can clearly see the arising of every thought and every emotion, we will no longer be controlled by them.

By realizing the truth of no-self, we come to understand life as it truly is. We no longer cling blindly to anything—whether within or beyond the body—as the true self, nor are we disturbed by the impermanence of the world.

By realizing the truth of no-self, we can awaken the wisdom that is inherently complete and uncover the ever-present Buddha-nature within.

Let us return to our true self, the very essence of life!

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国际静心协会、静心学堂简介

国际静心协会（简称 MPI）是 2021 年成立于瑞士苏黎世的非盈利组织，旨在向全球传播佛法智慧和禅意生活。

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。

“静心学堂丛书”呈现了禅意生活、智慧人生的部分课程。我们衷心希望，更多人由此了解生命觉醒的教育，共享东方智慧给人类带来的福祉。

Mindful Peace International & Mindful Peace Academy

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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