



静心学堂 丛书

The Mindful Peace Academy Collection

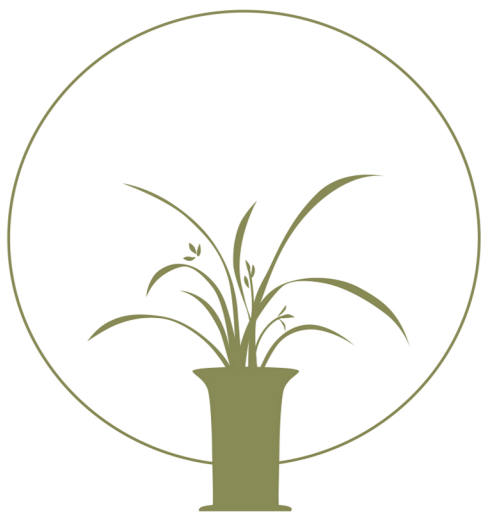
中英双语 Chinese-English Edition

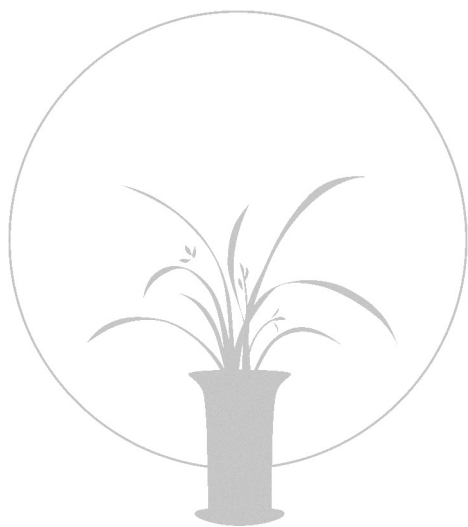
佛教徒的人生态度

The Life Attitudes of Buddhists

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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生活在这个世间，我们有各自的人生观、世界观、价值观。因为三观不同，生活经历不同，处世态度也大相径庭。作为佛教徒，应该怎样修行和生活？消极还是积极？乐观还是悲观？重生还是重死？自利还是利他？无情还是大爱？……这一系列问题，不仅社会有诸多误解，即使学佛者本身，多半也不甚了了。如果定位模糊，不仅会影响自身修行，也无法向社会传递佛教的思想内涵，展现佛弟子应有的精神面貌。有鉴于此，本次讲座将从八个方面，为大家解读“佛教徒的人生态度”。

一、消极还是积极

佛弟子要以佛菩萨为榜样
明确人生目标
积极地追求真理，传播正法
世人之所以认为佛教消极
只是以他们的感觉来衡量
并不了解佛教徒的追求
不知道佛教对人生和社会的价值

在一般人心目中，佛教徒是消极而悲观的。信佛只是老来无事的安慰，或事业、感情受挫后的疗伤之道……由于这些误解，许多人对佛门敬而远之，担心信佛后失去人生乐趣，或从此成为另类。那么，佛教徒究竟是不是消极的？如果不是，他们的积极又表现在哪些方面？想弄清这个问题，首先要探讨：什么是消极？什么是积极？

1. 消极、积极的定义和产生

消极和积极，代表我们的情绪、处世态度和行为方式。关于这个问题，我们先来看看两者的不同表现及产生背景。

(1) 消极和积极的表现

消极，指对某事没兴趣，从而不努力、不作为、不

争取，甚至有意识地回避、抵制，反之则是积极。就人生态度来说，消极往往和厌世连在一起，所谓“消极厌世”，听起来完全是负面的。

其实就词的本身来说，消极和积极是中性的。只有联系到具体事件，才有是非对错之分。如果对有意义的事不努力，这种消极是负面的，需要改变。如果热衷于无聊甚至错误的事，乐此不疲，这种积极也是负面的。简单地说，就是做该做的事，不做不该做的事。对这一点，想必大家没什么异议。

区别在于，什么是该做的，什么是正向而有意义的？这就取决于我们的价值观。价值观不同，对消极和积极的评判完全不同。在中国传统文化中，儒家比较入世，不仅要修身、齐家，还要治国、平天下，而道家崇尚无为而治。从社会发展来看，似乎积极进取是正向的。那么，一味强调发展可取吗？

改革开放以来，整个社会都在追求发展，恨不得把所有资源尽快变成财富。在经历长期贫困后，这种积极进取确实改变了人们的生活水平，有一定的正向意义。但随着生态环境的日益恶化，道德底线的不断被突破，在环境和精神的双重污染下，人们开始意识到盲目“积极”的副作用。各种假冒伪劣产品，各种社会乱象，不都是这种

“积极”追求的结果吗？

如果说不辨是非的积极是错误的，不可取的，那么明知故犯的积极就是在有意作恶，是必须禁止的。所以关键不在于做不做，而在于做什么，怎么做。

(2) 消极和积极的产生背景

我们为什么会对某些事积极进取，对某些事消极抵制？首先取决于自身认识。也就是说，你觉得什么重要，什么有价值，或是对什么感兴趣，被什么所吸引。我们回想一下，凡是自己积极努力过的，是不是都有这些特点？有句话叫“兴趣是最好的老师”，正是因为兴趣能激发主动性，让人全身心地投入其中。其中既有先天因素，来自过去生的积累；也有后天培养的，是由认识带来的动力。如果上升到责任感和使命感，这种积极就能一以贯之。

当年孔子为了恢复周礼，推行他的思想和政治主张，一生都在周游列国，四处游说。期间遭遇种种挫折，包括隐士们的冷嘲热讽，但他没有放弃，仍知其不可而为之。与孔子的积极入世相反，历史上还有许多寄情山水的隐士，过着淡泊无为的生活。《庄子》记载：尧有意将天下让与许由，许由不仅没感到欢喜，反而跑到河边清洗耳朵，觉得被此话玷污。这种机遇是孔子梦寐以求的，天下唾手可得，

正可用来大展鸿图。但人各有志，许由向往的是逍遥自在的人生，功名于他不但毫无意义，且避之唯恐不及。

除了价值观，消极和积极还和人生经历有关。有些人在成长过程中处处碰壁，工作不顺利，婚姻不幸福，种种挫折使他们看不到希望。长此以往，看问题不免偏于消极，总是想到并夸大可能出现的障碍，因为害怕失败而不愿尝试。也有些人一路顺利，看问题往往更积极，也更有信心去争取。当然，基于经历产生的态度未必稳定。因为境遇是变化的，当逆境和失败反复出现后，原本的积极者也可能一蹶不振，变得消极。

此外，消极和积极也受到外部环境的影响，所以古人才有“穷则独善其身，达则兼济天下”之说。若不得志时，不妨修身养性，完善自我；若得志显达，就可出来辅助明君，造福大众。

人生是短暂的，精力是有限的，不可能什么都要，所以我们时时都在面临选择。而选择就意味着取舍，在占有的同时也在放弃，其目的，是为了合理分配有限的时间和精力。对自己选择的事积极努力，而对其他与之无关又足以形成干扰的事，则消极对待。古人有玩物丧志之说，玩物何以会丧志？就是没有处理好主次关系，对本应浅尝辄止的事投入过多精力，以至影响到正常的学习和工作。

总之，消极和积极是相对的。在不同的人生阶段，对待不同的事，人们会作出各自的选择。至于选择什么，既受认识 and 经历的影响，也受环境的影响。这种选择决定了我们的人生道路，也决定了生命的意义所在。每个人都有自己热衷的事，但有些事只会让人沉迷、堕落甚至危害社会，是在积极地造恶业；也有些事能改善心行，提升生命品质，于人于己都有利益，是在积极地修善业。

2. 佛教是消极的吗

很多人认为佛教是消极的。之所以形成这种看法，主要有以下原因。

首先是出家制度引起的。出家人要放弃世俗生活，放弃对家庭、感情、财富、地位的占有和执著。而中国的传统观念是以成家立业为人生大事，以传宗接代为尽孝之本，进一步还要荣华富贵，光宗耀祖。从这个标准看，放下是消极的，追求功名才是积极的。

其次是生活方式引起的。世人热衷的无非是吃喝玩乐，尤其在今天，整个社会不断鼓动欲望，刺激消费，让人耽于现实和虚拟世界的双重享乐。但出家人素食独身，少欲知足，很多人对此感到不解，觉得佛弟子不热爱生活，与时代格格不入，是典型的自讨苦吃。

第三是处世态度引起的。世人都有强烈的我执，以自我为中心，很容易和他人对立。尤其是接受达尔文物竞天择、适者生存的理论后，人们不断地占有、攀比、竞争，形成冲突。包括个人和个人的冲突，团体和团体的冲突，乃至民族、国家之间的冲突。而出家人与世无争，奉行忍辱法门，在世人看来无疑是消极的。

从世人的标准，认为佛教消极，似乎不无道理。错在哪里？错在这个标准有问题。当标准错了，结论自然也是不可取的。

出家人虽然放弃对功名利禄的追求，但有更高的精神追求；出家人虽然放弃物质享乐，但追求究竟的解脱之乐；出家人虽然修习忍辱，但不是忍气吞声，更不是出于懦弱，而是以强大的心力，坦然接纳人生中的一切。在不制造对立的前提下，以智慧解决问题。

所以说，消极和积极不可一概而论。如果局限于某个点看问题，必然有失偏颇。只有从不同角度全面观察，深入思考，才能作出正确选择。而佛法正是从智慧的高度，为我们指引方向。

3. 明确目标，积极进取

那么，佛教徒究竟是积极还是消极的？主要取决于

观察角度。从世间生活来看，佛弟子是消极的；就人生追求而言，佛弟子又是积极的。

(1) 佛教徒有明确的人生目标

在佛弟子熟悉的四弘誓愿中，每个愿力都是以无边、无尽、无量、无上来形容，所谓“众生无边誓愿度，烦恼无尽誓愿断，法门无量誓愿学，佛道无上誓愿成”，真正体现了佛菩萨的广大愿心。这也是每一个佛弟子应当树立的人生目标。常人的目标往往局限于个人或家庭，而学佛是学佛所行，不仅要追求个人解脱，还要帮助众生离苦得乐。

佛教史上，无数高僧大德为了传播正法，舍生忘死。正是他们的不懈努力，才使佛法从印度传到中国，乃至世界各地，使一代又一代人因为闻法而受益。

唐代高僧鉴真和尚为了将佛法传到日本，六次东渡，历时十年，遭遇了人们难以想象的艰难。随行弟子相继被风浪和疾病夺去生命，他也因长路艰辛而失明，依然锲而不舍，终于在 66 岁高龄时踏上异邦，成为日本律宗的开山祖师。是什么支撑着他，一次次向茫茫大海出发？正如他自己所说：“传法事大，浩淼大海何足为惧？”在他决定东渡伊始，便已将生死置之度外，才不会被挫折阻挠。他所凭借的，正是为法忘躯、普度众生的积极追求。

(2) 佛教徒要研究经教，探索真理

学佛是追求真理的过程。只有积极研究经教，才能树立正见，依法修行，探索人生真谛。且不说佛陀在因地时为求半偈舍身的壮举，及菩萨们剥皮为纸、析骨为笔、刺血为墨的愿行，翻开《高僧传》，每一位前贤都为我们树立了榜样。

当年，玄奘三藏在国内遍访各地善知识后，有感于汉地流传的经典尚欠完备，毅然踏上西行求法之路。在那个年代，西去印度谈何容易，往往是“去者成百归无十”。在人迹罕至的戈壁、雪山，他无数次死里逃生，终于来到圣地，在当时的佛教最高学府那烂陀寺学习多年。玄奘的博闻强记和缜密思辨使印度各宗为之叹服，声誉之隆，一时无双。但他学法是为了将这一智慧传回东土，所以再次克服万难回到汉地，开始了中国佛教史上规模空前的译经事业。玄奘的一生都在积极研究经教，以探索真理为己任，真正体现了大乘行者救世之真精神。

作为佛弟子，我们也要见贤思齐，承担内修外弘的使命。因为佛法智慧是具有普世价值的，是一切众生都需要的。并不是说，只有我们存在困惑，别人没有困惑；只有我们要觉醒，别人不需要觉醒；只有我们要断烦恼，别

人不需要断烦恼。事实上，芸芸众生都有困惑和烦恼，只是无暇顾及或尚未意识到。古往今来，东西方哲人都在探寻生命真谛。我是谁？生从何来，死往何去？活着为什么？对于这些终极问题，如果没有佛陀证悟的智慧，仅仅靠玄想，是无法找到答案的。

所以，不论基于自身需要，还是芸芸众生的需要，我们都要积极研究经教，探索真理。虽然今天有了便利的学法条件，但在寻找真理的道路上，我们依然要以生命去践行，锲而不舍。

(3) 佛教徒要明辨是非，止恶行善

人间有善恶两种力量，所以自古就有“性本善”和“性本恶”之争。孰是孰非？从佛法角度来看，人性既不是善的，也不是恶的，而是两种力量的共存和博弈。学佛就是要止恶行善，所谓“诸恶莫作，众善奉行，自净其意，是诸佛教”。这一偈颂出自《华严经》，是过去七佛对弟子们的教诫。当年，白居易向鸟巢大师问法时，大师也是以此偈作答，可见其重要性。佛法博大精深，但在具体行持中，无非是断除不良心行，长养慈悲智慧。

声闻乘强调止持，重点在于“诸恶莫作”，但这么做本身也是一种行善方式。如果每个人都不杀生，我们就不

会受到伤害；如果每个人都不偷盗，我们就不会被巧取豪夺；如果每个人都不邪淫，世间就少了许多纠纷；如果每个人都不妄语，我们就不必担心受骗；如果每个人都不饮酒，保持清醒，很多悲剧就可以避免。进一步，还要断除贪嗔痴和无明我执，从根本上消除负面心行。

而菩萨道更强调“众善奉行”，不仅要持戒利益众生，还要主动行善。所以在菩萨戒中，除了摄律仪戒，还有摄善法戒、饶益有情戒。善事不论大小，都应随分、随力、随时去做。就像观音菩萨那样，“千处祈求千处应，苦海常作度人舟”。只要众生有困苦，就为他们分忧解难，并对所有众生视如己出，哪里需要就去哪里，不分亲疏，不求回报。这才是佛菩萨的无缘大慈，同体大悲。

不论是止恶，还是修善，都离不开积极的心态和行动。这不是一时的心血来潮，而要尽未来际地努力。

(4) 佛教徒要完善人格，济世度人

我们希望像佛菩萨那样济世度人，就要积极完善人格，从克服烦恼做起。众生之所以流转生死，正是因为内心的无明，而外境只是助缘。如果没有贪欲，我们就不会被名利牵引，成为欲望的奴隶；如果没有嗔恨，我们就不会被逆境所转，受第二支毒箭伤害；如果没有愚痴，我们

就不会看不清人生方向，糊里糊涂地跟着感觉走。

学佛是一项生命改造工程，是把现有的凡夫人格，改造为佛陀那样圆满了断德、智德、悲德的生命品质。所谓断德，是断除无始以来的烦恼杂染，使人格得以完善，这正是济世度人的基础。因为佛菩萨对众生要言传身教，既要说法度人，还要以自身德行摄受众生。所谓智德和悲德，就是圆满的智慧和慈悲。比如菩萨行布施时，不仅要三轮体空，还要难舍能舍。布施如此，六度万行莫不如此。为了利益众生，牺牲一切都在所不惜。可见，行菩萨道就意味着彻底的奉献，而且要尽未来际无有间断，广度众生无有疲厌。

不论哪种修行，都要战胜无始以来的串习。就像一人与万人敌，必须积极向前。佛教中有一种披甲精进，就像战士在战场上身披铠甲，冲锋陷阵。而修行要面对的敌人来自内心，只有战胜心魔，才能走出迷惑。所以说，人生最大的敌人是自己，而不是其他。

总之，佛弟子要以佛菩萨为榜样，明确人生目标，积极地追求真理，传播正法。从这个意义上说，佛教徒的人生态度无疑是积极的。世人之所以认为佛教消极，只是以他们的感觉来衡量，并不了解佛教徒的追求，不知道佛教对人生和社会的价值。

二、悲观还是乐观

佛陀说“人生是苦”
并不是让我们回避或被动地接受痛苦
更不是让我们悲观厌世
而是在看到真相后
不被眼前虚假的安乐所迷惑
从而找到痛苦之源
在根本上解决问题，离苦得乐

说到消极和积极，离不开另一个话题，那就是悲观和乐观。两者的相似在于，消极往往和悲观互为因果，积极往往和乐观互为因果。区别在于，消极、积极主要体现在处事态度和行为方式，而悲观、乐观则体现了我们的人生观和世界观，可以说是一种人生的底色。

1. 悲观、乐观的定义和产生

(1) 悲观和乐观的表现

关于悲观和乐观，常见的比喻是：桌上有半杯水，悲观者看到“空了一半”，感到沮丧；而乐观者看到“还有半杯”，感到满足。同样的对境，因为不同的心态，带来了截然相反的感受。从这个角度看，似乎悲观是不可取的。但从古至今，很多哲学家从更深的层次观察人生，却

得出悲观的结论。

叔本华就是其中代表，他认为：“生命是一团欲望，欲望不满足便痛苦，满足了便无聊，人生就在空虚和无聊之间摇摆。”可以说，这正是多数人的真实写照。欲望是生命的本能，当它没被满足时，人会因为空虚、希求而追逐，疲于奔命；一旦满足后，又会很快感到厌倦，必须再次追逐新的欲望。人生就在这样的轮回中被消耗，除了短暂的满足，看不到什么意义。所以叔本华还认为：“人生如同上好弦的钟，盲目地走。一切只听命于生存意志的摆布，追求人生目的和价值是毫无意义的。”

除了由哲学思考带来的悲观，普通人也会因性格、教育、人生境遇等形成悲观的心态，且往往和消极密切相关。相对前者，这种悲观属于浅层的，更容易改变。

乐观同样有深浅两种层次。如果因为生活顺利等外在因素带来的乐观，往往比较脆弱。可以说，只是一种相似的乐观，本身是没有根的，接近俗话所说的“傻乐”。这种乐观需要顺境支持，一旦遇到挫折，很难继续保持。甚至会因缺乏抗压能力，迅速转为悲观。这是我们需要警惕的。

真正意义上的乐观，是了知一切事物都有正反两方面。在此基础上，选择从正向的角度看问题。这是属于有

智慧的乐观。具备这种能力，不论遭遇什么，都能发现其中积极的一面，而不是被外在境遇影响。

(2) 悲观和乐观的产生背景

可见，悲观和乐观都有深浅两个层面。

深层的悲观，是来自对生命的思考和追问。因为找不到人生价值，不知道活着的意义，更多是看到人生的无奈、卑微和苦难。这种悲观不是名利、享乐等外在因素可以改变的。所以不少有思想的人，如哲学家、文学家、艺术家等，在功成名就后依然痛苦，甚至走上绝路。他们看到了人生的荒谬和虚幻，却找不到解决之道。人终有一死，如果觉得死后什么都没了，从某种意义上说，生命就毫无价值。

西方有句谚语说，如果人生只活一次，就等于没活。活一次，活一万年又能怎样？也很快会过去。恐龙曾在地球生存了一亿五千万年，称霸世界，却在六千万年前彻底灭绝，只有化石才能证明它们的存在。同样，不论我们现在有多少财富和事业，不论多么位高权重、名满天下，如果只活一次，几十年过去，一切就会随着死亡而结束。而在百千万亿年的历史长河中，再风光的一生，也渺小得如同尘埃。这样的生命，有什么价值？

人生在世，需要靠意义来支撑，这也是我们活着的理由。当然，有些人对生命没什么思考，只要像其他人那样，成个家，生个孩子，做个事业，就可以知足。最大的理想，无非是生活更加富足，孩子出人头地，事业一帆风顺。甚至不觉得人生还有更多的意义：大家不都这么过吗？还要怎样？但对有思想的人来说，很容易看透这些外在事物的短暂和虚幻，必须找到生命的意义才能安心。关于这些终极问题，如果没有大智慧，是很难找到答案的。上下求索而不得，殚精竭虑而无果，悲观在所难免。

佛教所说的“人生是苦”，也往往让人等同于悲观。叔本华的悲观，就被认为是受佛教思想的影响。其实这一认识是片面的。“苦”只是一种方便说，是针对凡夫而言。因为凡夫的生命本质是无明惑业，所谓“起心动念，无不是罪，无不是业”。但佛教又告诉我们，生命还有另一个层面。如果摆脱无明，断除烦恼，就能回归本具的觉性。

两种说法并不矛盾。生命有迷惑的层面，也有觉醒的层面，就像乌云和虚空。当虚空被乌云遮蔽，似乎乌云就是一切。其实虚空本身是澄澈的，当云开雾散，我们才会看到它的本来面目。从迷惑的层面来说，生命本质是痛苦的，令人悲观；从觉醒的层面来说，生命本质则是清净、圆满的，无须悲观。

2. 佛教是悲观的吗

在很多人的印象中，佛教是悲观的。这种误解主要来自出家制度和某些法义。

出家，古人称为遁入空门。一个“遁”字，似乎诉说着走投无路、看破红尘的无奈，以及心如止水、青灯古佛伴余生的寂寥。这也是很多文学、影视作品传递的意象。所以在世人看来，出家是懦弱者的退缩逃避，失意后的悲观选择。

事实上，这完全是一种误解。虽然出家者中确实有这些现象，但不是主流，更不是出家的本怀。佛陀当年身为王子，却放下荣华富贵，选择一无所有的出家生活。这么做，正是为了实现更高的精神追求。因为他看到老病死的痛苦，看到世俗生活的虚幻和无常，看到生命蕴含着迷惑和烦恼。如果不解决这些问题，就找不到生命的意义。相对随波逐流的世俗生活来说，出家可谓逆流而上的勇敢选择，绝不是出于悲观和逃避。

至于让人产生误解的法义，主要是声闻乘所说的苦、空、无常。世人对感情、事业、名利充满期待，追逐三有乐、五欲乐，乐此不疲。但佛法告诉我们，以迷惑烦恼为基础的生命，其本质是有漏的，快乐只是痛苦的暂时缓

解而已，转瞬即逝。对于佛教所说的涅槃，很多人也有误解，认为是死亡的代名词。其实，涅槃是要平息内在的迷惑和烦恼。佛教告诉我们，一切痛苦的根源，是来自错误认识和烦恼惑业。只有改变认识，消除烦恼，我们才能从轮回苦海中解脱出来。这种否定不是悲观，而是直面现实后的解决之道。就像治病，必须认识苦和苦因，并从根本上加以解决，才能恢复健康。

所以不论从出家制度还是教义来说，佛教都不是悲观的。所谓的悲观，只是人们从世俗角度产生的误解。有道是，“出家乃大丈夫事，非将相所能为。”一方面，放下世间享乐需要魄力；另一方面，追求真理更需要难行能行、难忍能忍的勇气，需要一人与万人敌的担当！

如果说声闻乘的否定，是对世间真相如实而智慧的认识，那么菩萨道的承担，更是对众生无尽的悲愿！对于大乘佛子来说，看到自身生命存在过患，就会推己及人，不忍众生身处苦海而不自知，从而发菩提心，把利益众生作为自己的使命。这不是一时的冲动，而需要尽未来际地实践。如此的大慈、大悲、大愿、大行，哪有丝毫悲观！所以在民国年间的人生观大讨论中，梁启超先生提出以佛法为人心建设的准则，认为菩萨的救世精神是“盖应于此时代要求之一良药”“乃兼善而非独善”。

3. 不悲不喜，如实知见

虽然佛教不是悲观的，但我们不要因此觉得，佛教就是乐观的。事实上，悲观和乐观都是对人生的片面认识。佛教是帮助我们建立如实智，使认识符合世界真相——那就是中观。

(1) 佛教不是悲观的

为什么说佛教不是悲观的？

首先，佛教虽然认为人生虚幻，告诉我们“一切有为法，如梦幻泡影”，但不否定现象的存在。佛教以缘起看世界，发现一切都是因缘因果的显现，是条件关系的假相，其中找不到独存、不变、能够主宰的实体。所以万物既不是恒常的，也不是断灭的。生命也是同样，就像河流，从无穷的过去一直延续到无尽的未来。如果不了解轮回，生命是没有长度的；如果不了解心性，生命是没有深度的。而佛法智慧既能帮助我们认识长度，也能开显深度，引导我们在缘起的当下通达空性，是如实而非悲观的认识。

其次，佛教虽然认为生命充满迷惑，但也告诉我们，众生都有自我拯救的能力。所谓迷惑，是对生命终极问题的茫然。因为找不到答案，就会活在自己感觉中，烦恼、

造业、不能自拔。生命的出路在哪里？学佛后才知道，在迷惑烦恼的背后，生命还有觉醒的潜质。释迦牟尼佛在菩提树下悟道时发现：我找到了古仙人道，过去诸佛都是沿着这条道路成就的。其后，佛陀说法四十五年，施設无数法门，引领众生走向觉醒。所以佛教指出凡夫生命现状的目的，不是让我们悲观沉沦，而是要唤醒世人，看到希望所在。

第三，佛教所说的菩提心和菩萨行，让生命充满意义，也在轮回中开辟出一条光明大道。在这条路上，诸佛菩萨、祖师大德都是成功的典范。很多哲学家之所以找不到出路，是因为他们仅仅依靠理性，而理性是有局限的。佛教不仅重视理性和正见，重视止观禅修，还通过发心和利他来消除我执，增长慈悲，是悲和智的共同成就。我们在佛陀指引下走上这条道路，追随那些前行的成就者，还有理由悲观吗？

如果我们真正了解佛教，尤其是菩萨道精神，就会知道佛教绝不是悲观的。

(2) 佛教也不是乐观的

那为什么说，佛教也不是乐观的？

首先，以迷惑和烦恼为本的人生是痛苦的。这在诸

多佛典中都有说明，如三苦、八苦乃至无量诸苦。大千世界不过是苦集之地，但世人由于无明，所见往往停留在表面，不曾触及背后的真相。我们以结婚成家为幸福，不知这是束缚的开始；以生儿育女为幸福，不知这是牵挂的开始；以事业有成为幸福，不知道这是压力的开始……面对人生的现实，我们无法乐观。

其次，我们必须正视生命的无常。生命是脆弱的，死是一定的，什么时候死是不一定的。死了会去哪里？我们今世得到人身，有缘闻法。如果现在一口气不来，对来生有把握吗？如果现在不能做自己的主，一旦死亡来临，更没能力做主，只有随业流转。在修行成就前，我们无法乐观。

第三，我们要看到三恶道的险境。无始以来，我们曾造下种种不善业，一旦业力成熟，就会落入恶道，长劫受苦。只要生命中还有烦恼惑业，我们将永远在六道流转。即使有幸做人，能否遇到善知识，能否听闻佛法，都是未知。所以，生命的去向不容我们乐观。

第四，即便修行有成，生死自在，但作为大乘佛子，我们还承担着济世度人的使命。看到众生深陷苦海，我们于心不忍，发愿救度。但众生刚强难调，不是你有心就能帮助得了的。看到菩萨行的艰难，看到众生的冥顽不化，

我们难以乐观。

第五，我们还要正视末法时代的乱象。在今天，天灾人祸不计其数，我们居住的地球已被人类的贪欲破坏得满目疮痍，空气、水源、森林、草场、山体，包括南北两极，哪里都有污染，都在遭受破坏，甚至是不可逆转的破坏。在这五浊恶世，触目所及都是自掘坟墓式的险境。面对严峻的现实，我们无法乐观。

所以说，生命的前景虽然光明，但现实不容我们乐观。

(3) 中观的人生态度

佛教修行重视中道，体现在人生态度上，就是不悲不喜的中观。因为悲观和乐观都建立在片面认识的基础上。悲观，易沉沦；乐观，易冒进。佛陀在无数开示中告诫我们：要如实地看自己，看世界。既看到生命存在的过患，生起离苦得乐之心，同时也看到生命具有自我拯救的能力，对修行抵达的光明前景充满信心。

怎样建立中观的人生态度？首先要具备正见。这也是八正道之首，必须远离常见和断见，所谓“不生亦不灭，不常亦不断，不一亦不异，不来亦不出”。有了正见，生活上，既不放纵欲望，也不一味自苦；修行上，既要努力精进，也不过于紧绷，就像琴弦，不松不紧才能奏

出妙乐。

我们对法义的理解也是同样，不仅要看到字面传达的意思，更要看到文字隐藏的内涵。这样才能知其然也知其所以然，而不是以偏概全，错解圣意。比如佛陀说“人生是苦”，并不是让我们回避或被动地接受痛苦，更不是让我们悲观厌世，而是在看到真相后，不被眼前虚假的安乐所迷惑，从而找到痛苦之源，在根本上解决问题，离苦得乐。只有正视生命现状，我们才能运用佛法智慧，积极改善生命，利益众生。

三、禁欲还是纵欲

少一分欲望

就少一分牵挂

少一分修行路上的羁绊

所以，少欲知足

是佛教对物欲的基本态度

同时，我们还要不断激发善法欲

上求佛道，下化众生

出家人的形象是独身、素食、僧装，身无长物。而在原始僧团中，出家人更简单到三衣一钵，乞食为生。“一钵千家饭，孤身万里游”“一池荷叶衣无尽，数树松花食有余”“千峰顶上一间屋，老僧半间云半间”等禅诗，也从不同侧面体现了这种无欲无求的生活方式。所以，世人普遍认为佛教是禁欲的。年轻人往往对学佛心存畏惧：以后还能结婚吗？还能过正常人的生活吗？似乎学佛后就要与世隔绝，无欲无求。

其实这也是由来已久的误解。因为欲有不同内涵，并不仅限于物质。同时，佛教对出家、在家等不同修行者有相应的戒律，并不是人们以为的，学佛就等于禁欲。那么，佛教是如何看待欲望的呢？

1. 什么是欲

欲，即需求。有来自生理的，也有来自心理的；有本能性的，也有社会性的。佛教中，把世界分为欲界、色界和无色界，又称三界。我们所在的是欲界，生活其间的众生都被欲望主宰，为满足欲望日夜操劳，甚至赔上性命，所谓“人为财死，鸟为食亡”。

(1) 人类的基本欲望

从人道来说，欲望主要体现为财、色、名、食、睡五种。财，是对财富的需求。色，是对情和性的需求。名，是对名誉的需求。食，是对食物的需求。睡，是对睡眠的需求。常人每天要睡八小时左右，生命三分之一的时间都在睡眠中度过。

五欲中，又以食欲和色欲最为突出，所谓“饮食男女，人之大欲存焉”。这也是人类得以生存并繁衍的基础。经言，“一切有情皆依食住。”通常所说的食特指饮食，但这里包括段食、触食、思食和识食。段食即日常饮食，是滋养色身的主要条件；触食即所接触的外在环境，是生活质量的重要指标；思食即求生意志，也是活下去的动力；识食是执持生命延续的阿赖耶识。

具体到每个人，对欲望又有所偏重。爱财者，可以为

挣钱不择手段；贪色者，可以为美色失去理智；虚荣心强的人，可以为名声付出一切；贪吃如饕餮之徒，认为享用美食才是人生至乐；而贪睡的人，为了睡觉不惜浪费光阴。

五欲又建立在眼、耳、鼻、舌、身五根的基础上，这是我们感受世界的五种渠道。五根同样对外境充满强烈的欲望，眼睛贪著悦目的色彩，耳朵贪著动听的声音，鼻子贪著芬芳的气息，舌头贪著食物的美味，身体贪著舒适的环境。

除了这些生理欲望，还有来自心理的、社会性的欲望。其中包括对基本欲望的升级，比如追求名牌，追求感觉，以及为跟上社会潮流产生的需求。一个人需要住多大的房子？几十年前的标准就和现在完全不同。这种变化更多是来自心理需要，来自社会上的相互攀比。

此外还有纯粹的精神追求，或来自信仰，或来自文学艺术等领域。这些同样属于欲望的范畴，所以才有精神食粮之说。如果没有欲望，我们就不会上下求索地寻求信仰，也不会有创作作品的冲动，甚至没有欣赏艺术的乐趣。那样的话，人类历史该是多么乏味。

(2) 对欲的不同看法

应该如何看待欲望？是视为洪水猛兽，严加禁止；

还是视为天赋人权，纵情享乐？自古以来，宗教师和哲学家们有着不同的观点。

佛陀在世时，印度就有九十六种外道，大多崇尚禁欲。他们认为欲望是罪恶之源，必须以折磨肉体来灭除欲望，才能净化身心。佛陀修行之初，曾在王舍城外的苦行林中亲见各种修法：有的忍饥挨饿，有的整天泡在水中，有的长年单足站立，有的赤身在烈日下曝晒……受此影响，佛陀也开始了长达六年的苦行，“或日食一麻，或日食一粟，身形消瘦，有若枯木”，甚至在尼连禅河沐浴时，因虚弱无法上岸。这使他认识到，极端的禁欲除了令身体羸弱，并不能增长智慧，成就解脱。

基督教同样认为欲望导致了人类的堕落。亚当和夏娃本来无忧无虑地在乐园中生活，却在魔鬼诱惑下偷吃禁果，结果被逐出乐园。所以在基督教的道德规范中，欲望和虔敬、清净的宗教生活是冲突的。人类必须克服贪欲，严格自律，才能令心圣洁。

除了宗教，哲学家是怎么看待欲望的呢？安底斯泰纳和第欧根尼是古希腊犬儒派哲学的代表，他们认为欲望是导致一切痛苦的根源，提出“美德是知足，无欲是神圣”的主张，并亲自实践。他们所有的财产，就是一根棍子、一件外衣、一条讨饭袋、一个喝水的钵。一次，第欧

根尼在河边见到孩子用手捧水喝，深受启发，索性连钵都扔了。

在早期儒家思想中，并没有将欲望视为洪水猛兽。如荀子所说的“饥而欲食，寒而欲暖，劳而欲息，好利而恶害，是人之所生而有也”，还是肯定了人的基本所需。其后才逐渐重视欲望的危害，发展至宋明理学，更提出“灭人欲，存天理”，认为道德必须在灭除欲望后才能显现。

而西方在文艺复兴运动之后，一反中世纪的神权禁锢，开始肯定欲望的合理性。认为饮食、睡眠、性爱都是人的本能，这些需要是正当的。人类完全有理由享受与生俱来的需求。对欲望的肯定和鼓励，极大促进了西方科技和经济的发展，但也带来层出不穷的社会问题。

2. 佛教怎么看待欲望

佛教认为，从道德属性上，欲望可分为善、恶和无记三种。

(1) 欲是生命延续的保障

人生在世有基本的生存需求，这也是人类社会得以延续的基础。比如饿了要吃饭，渴了要喝水，困了要睡觉，包括在家弟子的正当家庭生活等，这类非善非恶的欲

望，佛教称为“无记”。只要保持适当的度，并不会带来什么副作用，也不必刻意自苦其身。因为色身就像工具，善加养护，才能有效使用，发挥更大作用。

佛陀当年也曾尝试从禁食到闭气等各种苦行，长达六年之久。但他并没有因为一味禁欲的苦行而觉悟，反而损害了身体。这使他认识到，盲目自苦对修道无益，好比砂中榨油，不会有任何结果。所以佛陀接受了牧女的乳糜供养，恢复体力后，在菩提树下精进禅坐，并最终证悟。

(2) 欲望的副作用

佛陀反对无益苦行，但更反对放纵欲望，时时提醒弟子们要“少欲知足”。因为从凡夫的本性来说，通常更倾向纵欲而非苦行。而且欲望会不断扩张，主要表现为占有、比较和竞争。

今天的大多数人，生存问题早已解决，但欲望并未因此减少，反而在不断升级：希望占有更多的财富，更高的地位，更大的名望，永无止境。除了占有，我们还会与他人攀比。有些人一生努力就是为了出人头地，却没想到，超过别人的意义在哪里？这些无谓的攀比，只会使自己背上沉重的负担。比较又导致竞争，这固然在一定程度上激发了人的潜力，促进了社会发展，却使我们活得焦

虑、紧张、疲惫不堪。

人们不停地占有、攀比、竞争，无非是想过上幸福生活。但对很多人来说，财富得到了，事业得到了，名声得到了，享乐得到了，却依然感觉不到幸福。因为幸福是一种不稳定的感觉，和欲望密切相关。当欲望被满足，才会产生幸福感。现代人的欲望越来越多，也越来越不容易被满足，这就使得幸福成本变得特别高，活得特别累。我们在不知不觉中培养了很多欲望，当这些欲望上升到贪著时，痛苦就随之而来了。

今天，人们拥有的物质已前所未有的丰富，多到需要不断丢弃的地步，是不是就能过得幸福？如果一件物品就代表一个幸福的因素，那我们的幸福指数就该不断攀升。事实上，物质带来的幸福感正在衰减。在贫困年代，人们吃上一餐美食都会心满意足，念念不忘。但现在，吃多了只会觉得太累。西方心理学家的调查显示，现代人得到向往已久的物品，或升职加薪，幸福感不会超过三个月。而下一次的幸福感，必须来自更好的物品，更高的职位，但人生能一直得到更好、更高的吗？

当欲望不断增长，就会焦虑、恐惧、缺乏安全感。一个人得到越多，对得而复失的担心就越强烈。一旦所得发生变化，就会产生仇恨、对立、斗争等负面心理，痛苦

也就随之而来。问题是，世间一切都是无常的。我们贪著财富，可财富会贬值；贪著感情，可感情会变化；贪著地位，可地位会失去；贪著人际关系，可什么关系都是靠不住的，所谓世间没有永远的朋友，只有永远的利益。如果不放下贪欲，痛苦是永无止境的。

更有甚者，为了满足欲望走上犯罪道路。世间种种不法现象，究其根源，基本都出自贪欲，以及由贪而不得引发的嗔恨。为了满足欲望，不仅给自身带来灾难，也给他人和社会带来灾难。包括国与国的战争，往往也是觊觎他国资源引发的。

除了对现世的影响，贪著也是造成轮回的因。在十二缘起中，有情之所以有生和老死，直接的因就是“爱、取、有”。因为对需求对象产生贪爱，就会付诸行动，形成业果，将有情捆绑在轮回中。所以我们要对欲望加以节制，盲目地占有、比较、竞争，只是在消耗生命，而不是享受生命，更不能提升生命品质。

(3) 善法欲是完善人格的动力

前面说过，欲是需求，本身是中性的，关键在于我们需求的是什么。心理学家马斯洛认为，人有五种需求，包括生理需求、安全需求、情感和归属需求、尊重需求、

自我实现和超越自我的需求。可见，欲望也能成为高尚的精神追求。佛教中的善法欲，就是追求善法的愿望。比如“我要解脱”“我要成佛，要帮助众生成就解脱”，既是修行的目标，也是持久的动力。那么怎样才能建立善法欲？必须接受智慧的文化。

在声闻乘修行中，首先要发出离心，即出离五欲六尘的愿望。禅修有“欲、勤、心、观”四要素，又称四神足。其中的欲，就是“我要修行”的意愿，这是禅修的重要前提。如果没有这种意愿，根本不可能开始修行，更谈不上坚持。《百法明门论》的五别境心所，是“欲、胜解、念、定、慧”，其中也以欲为首，这是迈向解脱的动力。大家来这里闻法，同样是因为“我要学习佛法，要解脱迷惑和烦恼，要追求智慧和真理”的需求，这些都属于善法欲。

在菩萨道修行中，则要发菩提心，包括愿菩提心和行菩提心。愿菩提心，是建立崇高的利他主义愿望。只有在十方诸佛和一切众生前确立这样的愿心，将其作为自己尽未来际的使命，才能进一步受菩萨戒，行菩萨行。此为行菩提心，是建立在愿心的基础上，也是对愿心的落实。

只有了解欲望的不同属性，我们才能正确看待并加以引导，让这一心理为修行服务，而不是被烦恼所用。

3. 少欲知足，自利利他

对物质无止境的欲望，不仅让人辛苦，也不能带来幸福。因为心才是感受幸福的根本，物质只是辅助条件，所以佛教反对纵欲，反对本能性、物质性的欲望。但也不主张绝对禁欲，尤其是生存的基本需求，关键是适度。进而提倡惜福，让我们少欲知足。这样既有利于生存，也有利于环境保护，而不是一味向大自然索取。

(1) 少欲知足是幸福人生的保障

中国人本身就有惜福、惜物的传统，但这短短几十年来，人们的消费观有了巨大变化。现在流行的是能挣会花，是旧的不去新的不来，甚至是贷款消费。尤其是年轻人，觉得只要自己有钱，或是能借到钱，为什么不花？这种观念的背后，正是对欲望的纵容。而它带来的后果也是触目惊心的。近年来，年轻人因无力还贷而陷入困境、甚至走上绝路的新闻比比皆是，其中不少还是学生。他们之所以一错再错，起因往往很小，只是为了得到某个超出自己消费能力的物品，最后却葬送了宝贵的生命。欲望的危害，令人痛心。

那么在有能力承担的情况下，就可以毫无节制地消费吗？佛教中，“福尽死”属于九种死亡原因之一。因为

福报就像存款，比如你的寿限本来可以到 80 岁，但 50 岁把福报提前用完，就活不下去了。从另一个角度看，有些物品虽能带来方便和享乐，但我们为了得到它，却要投入大量时间。而人生的每分每秒都是一去不复返的，从这个角度想，有些消费真的是在消耗生命！

两千年前，哲学家苏格拉底曾面对繁华的集市惊叹：“这市场有多少我不需要的东西啊！”随着欲望的不断升级，今天的商品多了何止千万倍？但这种丰富不但没有使人变得轻松，相反，生活节奏越来越快，压力越来越大，甚至没时间静下心来想一想：究竟为什么如此忙碌？我们付出的努力，也许仅仅是换取一些本来可以不需要的东西，值得吗？

其实，人类维持生存的所需并不多。如果生活简朴些，就可以有更多闲暇充实自己，陪伴家人；可以让自己慢下来，看花开花落，云卷云舒；可以让自己放下负担，找寻生命的终极意义。

(2) 少欲知足是保护环境的手段

人类生存在地球，也有共同的福报。我们珍惜自己的福报，也是在珍惜人类共同的福报，保护人类共同的家园。欲望是无限的，但资源是有限的。人类为了满足欲

望，向自然盲目索取，大量森林和耕地遭到破坏，使得水土流失，天灾人祸频频发生。所以，众多有识之士都在为环保奔走呼吁。

事实上，这是每个人应尽的责任，也是每个人难辞其咎的。就基本的衣食住行而言，不断增长的欲望就在破坏环境。其中，饮食方式造成的污染不容忽视。据有关资料统计，美国每生产一磅肉类，需要使用 2500 加仑的水，相当于一个家庭一个月的用水量；而肉食者所需的生活用水，达素食者的 12 倍之多。此外，由饲养家禽产生的排泄物和废水，对水资源的消耗和污染，更是后患无穷。

人们对服装的需求，也不单纯是为了御寒。比如对裘皮时装的喜好，直接威胁到动物的生存，使大量动物因为美丽的皮毛遭到捕杀，影响自然的和谐与生态平衡。我们对居住环境的要求也日益提高，即使在中国这样的发展中国家，房产开发同样毫无节制。尤其是近年，不仅城市向农村扩张，即使在乡村，住宅也日复一日地侵占着耕地面积。而汽车的普及，在为人们提供生活便利的同时，也成为污染空气的罪魁，并带来世界范围内的能源危机。

如果对欲望不加节制，必然会向自然索取资源，进而破坏环境。这是对未来的透支，也是在消耗子孙后代的福报。所以，少欲知足对环保具有重要意义。

(3) 少欲知足是修行解脱的助缘

对于修行来说，少欲知足更是必须遵循的生活准则。因为欲望会无休止地追逐外境，使心不得自在。欲望越多，内心就越动荡，由此而来的烦恼也就越多。如果任其发展，最终可能失去理智，甚至失去道德，成为修行路上的巨大障碍。

“戒为正顺解脱之本。”戒律的很多规范，都是佛陀为弟子们去除干扰、安住修行制定的。奉行俭朴的生活原则，就不必为了衣食住行耗费生命，可以把时间和精力用来修行，用来追求真理。现代人都讲究性价比，却很少思考，投入时间就是投入生命，难道不应该考虑性价比吗？不应该评估这项投入的产出吗？

少一分欲望，就少一分牵挂，少一分修行路上的羁绊。所以，少欲知足是佛教对物欲的基本态度。与此同时，我们还要不断激发善法欲，上求佛道，下化众生。在放下一己私欲的同时，对一切有情建立无尽的悲愿。

四、重生还是重死

人生是修行的立足点
必须牢牢把握机会
以这个身份听闻正法，精进行修
但今生是短暂的
而且轮回路险
稍有不慎就会堕落
这就必须关注死后的归宿
对未来做好准备

生和死，是人类无法回避的永恒话题。今天的人已能上天入海，但面对死亡依旧束手无策。死了会去哪里？生命就此终结了吗？有人说，既然活着就还没死，不必在乎；既然死了就无法思考，所以不必追问真相，那只是庸人自扰而已。果然如此吗？对时刻都在走向生命终点的我们来说，如果对死亡一无所知，能安然吗？能走对人生路吗？当生命接近终点，我们能坦然面对吗？回望来时路，我们能无愧于心吗？当年，佛陀正是因为目睹老病死的痛苦，才出家修行，探寻生命真相。而在佛教修行中，念死无常、临终关怀、超度亡者都是不可或缺的重要内容。也有人因此认为，佛教不重视生，只重视死。是这样吗？佛教所说的念死究竟有什么内涵？

1. 人生两件大事

世间每天都有无数生命诞生，也有无数生命死亡。作为一期生命的开始和终结，生和死贯穿了整个人生，具有同等重要的意义。对于生死的认识，也建立在它们的相互关系上。孔子说，“未知生，焉知死？”其实逆向思维同样成立：未知死，又焉知生？西方哲学家说，哲学就是死亡的练习，学哲学就是为死亡做好准备。这并不是让我们时刻模拟死亡，而是想到人终有一死，学会从另一个角度看待人生。正是死亡的必然来临，才显示了活着的价值，使我们珍惜生命。可以说，对生死的认识，直接关系到人生观的确立。

(1) 重生和重死

有情都有求生的本能，蝼蚁尚且偷生，何况人类？我们生活在世间，希望拥有更多的财产，更高的地位；希望事业成功，理想实现……这一切都是建立在生的基础上，只有在活着的前提下才有意义。

从人类早期的生殖崇拜，到古代的炼丹术，以及今天层出不穷的保健品、养生术，都反映了人类对生的贪恋。因为生就意味着希望：“生命，也许是宇宙之间唯一应该受到崇拜的因素。生命的孕育、诞生和显示，本质上

是一种无比激动人心的过程。”拥有生命，才能创造无限的可能性。所以人们总是为孩子的出生而欢庆，也会在面对疾病和灾难时，为挽救生命不惜代价。古人说，“救人一命，胜造七级浮屠”。其实很多人在施以援手时，未必是为了某种功德，而是出于对生命的敬畏，不忍看到生命就此消失。

但生命是脆弱的。从我们出生开始，没有一天不在趋向末日。年轻时或许还不能意识到时光无情，一旦步入老年，对死亡的恐惧再也无法回避。“老来岁月增作减”，每过一年，便少了一年；每过一日，便少了一日。一口气不来，转息就是来生。人终有一死，人人平等，无法幸免。所以，这也是很多宗教关心的终极问题。或者说，正是出于对死亡真相的探寻，才有了宗教。

基督教的信仰，是建立在永生的希望上。他们认为尘世生活是虚幻的，天堂才是永恒的归宿，并提出神化的永生，所以耶稣之死被宣告为拯救。而信徒只要通过对上帝的虔诚祈祷，就能使死亡成为通往不朽的起点。《圣经》中，上帝向子民宣告：“复活在我，生命也在我。信我的人，虽然死了，也必复活。凡活着信我的人，必永远不死。”那么，上帝真的能够赋予死亡以新生吗？这种对永生的期待真的会兑现吗？

(2) 佛教只重视死亡吗

佛教是如何看待死亡的呢？为什么在人们的印象中，佛教特别重视死亡？主要是有以下四个原因。

首先，释迦牟尼佛曾贵为王子，尽享人间至乐，但看到老病死的痛苦后，深切认识到世间生活的虚幻，毅然舍俗出家，一心修道。可以说，被死亡触动，追求不死之道，是佛陀走向解脱的动力。在某种意义上，也是佛教产生的重要助缘。这样的起点，使人们将死亡和佛教联系起来，甚至划上等号。

其次，在声闻乘修行中，以证悟涅槃、成就阿罗汉果为目标。而在很多人心目中，涅槃等同于死亡，只不过是圣者的死亡，比如佛陀离世就被称为涅槃。如果以证悟涅槃为究竟，不正说明佛教重死而舍生吗？事实上，涅槃包括有余依涅槃和无余依涅槃，重点是对烦恼的止息，对生死的超越，并不是死亡的代名词。

第三，这种误解和净土宗的盛行有关。自东晋慧远大师在庐山东林寺结莲社创立净土宗以来，西方极乐世界就成了很多学佛者向往的归宿。这一法门的殊胜在于，可仰仗阿弥陀佛的愿力，与纯粹依靠自力的其他各宗相比，更能深入到普罗大众中。尤其是明清以来，其流传之广，可谓“家家阿弥陀，户户观世音”，使人以为学佛的重点

就是求往生，求来世。

第四，经忏佛事起到推波助澜的作用。元朝以来，经忏十分盛行。尤其在江浙一带，寺院忙于超度，几乎失去教化大众的功能。人们进寺院烧几支香，拜一拜，除了求现世平安，往往是因为家里有了丧事，才想到请出家人念念经，做场佛事。一来希望亡者有个好去处，二来对亲属也是个安慰。

基于以上原因，不少人觉得佛教只关心死亡，只是为亡者服务的。这些观点有一定现实基础，但也带着对佛教的片面认识及某种歪曲。比如净土法门提倡念佛往生，关心死后去向，但和基督教所说的进入天国有本质不同。净土宗是在自力的基础上，再借助弥陀的愿力，也就是说，他力必须通过自力才能实现。《弥陀经》告诉我们，彼国是“诸上善人俱会一处，不可以少善根福德因缘得生彼国”。可见西方净土不是想去就能去的，必须有福报，有德行，有善根。福报从哪里来？从人间的修行来，从信愿行三资粮来。

2. 佛教关注现实人生

正确的理解是什么？佛教对生死的认识，既不同于唯物主义者的断见，也不同于其他宗教宣扬的永生。今生

虽然短暂，但生命就像河流，无始无终，生生不息。而且还具有可塑性，可以通过修行加以改造。所以说，佛教首先关注现实人生，然后才重视死后归宿。这种关注主要体现在以下几个方面。

(1) 佛教重视人的身份

一般宗教认为天堂才是最好的去处，但佛教认为，生而为人，尤其是得到暇满人身，有缘听闻佛法，比生天可贵得多。因为天道只有享乐，令天人沉迷其中，无暇修行。问题在于，这种福报并不长久，一旦天福享尽，还要继续轮回。

相比之下，人间有苦有乐，就有离苦得乐的动力。而且人有理性，能通过闻思佛法、断恶修善改造生命。所以佛法认为，真理和智慧属于人间，终不在天上。我们的本师释迦牟尼佛，就是在人间而不是天上成佛的。但得到人身并不容易，佛陀曾告诫弟子说：得人身者就像指甲里的土这么少，未得人身者就像大地土那么多。指甲土和大地土，比例何其悬殊？机会何其难得？所以佛教特别看重人的身份，认为人身是生命的中转站。六道中，地狱和饿鬼的众生太痛苦，没办法修行；动物太愚痴，没能力修行；天人太快乐，没心思修行。只有人道，不论外在环境

还是自身条件，都适合修行。我们要改变命运，乃至成佛作祖，都需要人的身份。

(2) 佛教重视当下的修行

当下的概念，大家应该很熟悉，但其中究竟蕴含着多大的分量？佛教认为，生命就像瀑流，过去已经过去，无法改变；未来尚未到来，不知会发生什么。我们能把握的只有当下。既然要重视当下，是否可以今朝有酒今朝醉？须知，无穷的过去以现在为归宿，无尽的未来以现在为开端。我们现在的起心动念、语默动静，都会影响到未来生命。我们希望未来有好的归宿，也要从当下开始。这就必须明确人生目标，有愿力，有规划，知道自己想要什么样的人生，现在应该做些什么。

很多人认为修行就是修来世，这是错误的。佛教有句话叫现法乐住，告诉我们，修行的当下就能从中受益，身心安乐。生命是无尽的积累，我们每天践行佛法，就在不断改善生命。参与修学的学员在这方面应该深有体会，我们遵循次第修学和服务大众模式，内心的烦恼和困惑在减少，智慧和慈悲在增加，心越来越开放，越来越欢喜。这都是走向解脱的表现。

什么叫解脱？就是逐步解除无明惑业的束缚，最终解

除生死的束缚。所以修行并不是要到死后才知道结果，在当下的现实人生，我们就可以体验这种法喜，这种自在。生的时候可以做自己的主人，临命终时才能做生死的主人。如果现在无力做主，是不可能在最后关头了生脱死的。

(3) 佛教重视对现实人生的改善

近代太虚大师倡导人生佛教，提出“佛法是人生的大智慧”。在多年弘法过程中，我也始终遵循这一理念，希望通过对佛法的现代解读，引导人们将这一智慧运用到生活的方方面面，从中受益。

佛教在流传过程中，既有面向精英的哲学式的佛教，建构了完整而深奥的理论体系，如汉传佛教的天台、华严、三论、唯识等宗派；也有面向百姓的民俗式的佛教，通常就是求求拜拜，懂些因果道理。而对很多现代学佛者来说，既没有精力钻研过于深奥的理论，也不满足于简单的求平安。怎么让他们认识到这一智慧的殊胜，生起好乐之心？

人生佛教的定位，就是以通俗的语言解读佛法，帮助大众从这个角度认识人生，指导生活。虽然佛教各宗有深奥的哲理，但目标都是帮助我们认识人生和世界，进而加以改善。事实上，所有问题都可以用佛法智慧来解读。

因为世界的问题，归根到底都是人的问题，是心的问题。而佛教自古就被称为“心学”，有理论，有实践，可以帮助我们各个角度认识并调整心行。人生佛教同样如此。如果说有什么不同，就是以现实人生为切入点，从当下的修行中成就解脱。

(4) 佛教以解除众生痛苦为使命

作为佛教徒，我们不仅要解除自身问题，还要关爱众生，以众生的痛苦为自己的痛苦，以众生的需要为自己的需要。大乘佛教提倡的六度四摄，就是利益众生的方便。六度为布施、持戒、忍辱、精进、禅定、般若，四摄为布施、爱语、利行、同事，都是以布施为先，佛教称为种福田。世间的慈善事业主要是扶贫济困，而佛教的布施不仅有财布施，还包括法布施和无畏施。因为世人的痛苦形形色色，不是仅仅依靠物质就能从根本上解决的。

佛陀在因地时，为救度众生出生入死，他是为众生而修行，为众生而成佛。很多人以为拜佛就是恭敬，念佛就是修行，却忽略了利他行，这就偏离了佛菩萨济世的本怀。我们学佛，不仅要学习佛陀的所言，更要身体力行地实践佛陀的所行。

(5) 佛经中对现实人生的关怀

佛法修行有人天乘、声闻乘和菩萨乘之分，最终目标是引导我们成就菩提，但这离不开人天乘的基础，离不开对现实人生的关怀。《药师经》中，就讲述了药师佛对娑婆众生的无限慈悲。他不仅满足众生的物质需求，“令诸有情皆得无尽所受用物，莫令众生有所乏少”；还为众生拔除病苦，“若诸有情众病逼切，无救无归，无医无药，无亲无家，贫穷多苦，我之名号一经其耳，众病悉除，身心安乐”；更进一步为众生消灾免难，为众生庄严相貌，求健康得健康，求长寿得长寿。及至众生临命终时，依旧不弃不离，根据众生的愿力帮助其往生十方净土。

此外，《善生经》《十善业道经》等经典都是佛教关怀现实人生的体现。佛教认为世界的原理可以归纳为“因缘因果”四个字。命运发展不是神的旨意，而是取决于自己的行为。佛陀只是告诉我们什么事能做，什么事不能做；告诉我们行善和作恶的结果，告诉我们离苦得乐的方法，但如何改造自己的命运，还得靠自己的努力修行。

佛陀就是以人身成佛的，不是神或上帝的使者。基督教中，人是由上帝创造的，命运完全掌握在上帝手中。而佛教认为，佛和众生的差别，只是在迷与悟一念间。每个人都可以从改善当下做起，通过修行开发本具的佛性。

佛陀说法四十五年，就是为了让众生获得现世乐、来生乐、究竟解脱乐。所以说，佛教首先关注众生当下的幸福，再以这个暇满人身为法器，使生命产生质的飞跃。

3. 佛教重视死后归宿

除了现实人生，佛教也很重视念死的修行，重视死后的归宿。否则人很容易沉迷在对世间名利的追求中，完全忘记生命的终点。一旦死亡到来，因为没有任何思想准备，往往难以接受。或是觉得老天不公而痛苦沮丧，或是不知如何应对而茫然失措，或是在各种抢救中备受折磨。尤其是中青年，事业热火朝天，人生计划无数，突然间死神降临，一切都要画上句号。人们不甘放下现有的一切，对生无比留恋；不知死后去往哪里，对死充满恐惧。不想死，但不得不死。可能这时候才会理解，为什么古人把“好死”作为五福之一。

因为死是人生最重大的考验，也是此生走到尽头的最后考验，能否顺利过关，离不开平日的修行功夫。如果时时提起念死之心，从死亡的角度审视人生，就不容易陷入眼前得失，从而对人生作出正确取舍。知道什么是暂时的，过眼云烟而已；也知道什么是真正重要的，必须牢牢把握。关于这个问题，佛教一方面是通过死亡的记忆，

帮助我们调整心态；一方面是通过临终关怀等，帮助临终者顺利提起正念。

(1) 通过念死珍惜人身，策励修行

净土宗祖师印光法师常年在寮房挂着一个“死”字，以此策励自己，“当勤精进，如救头燃”。因为人很容易被眼前假相所迷惑，前日不死，昨日不死，今日不死，好像就可以永远活下去，好像修行时间还很多，不用着急。事实上，死亡随时可能到来。

明天和死亡哪个更远？没人可以确保。《宝鬘论》云：“人住死缘内，如灯在风中。”生命短暂脆弱，就像风中之灯，随时会被业风吹灭。尤其是末法时代的众生，命浅福薄，死缘者多，生缘者少。佛陀更是提醒我们：人命只在呼吸之间，一口气不来，转息就是来生。念死的目的，就是让我们认识到人身难得，佛法难闻，要抓紧现有的机会好好修行。

现代社会流行倒计时，比如高考倒计时，提前一年就会开始，目的也是通过压力来制造动力，让考生们不敢懈怠。事实上，念死就是人生的倒计时。它的压力还在于，我们不知道剩下多少时间，只知道过去一天，就少了一天，你把握住了吗？

人生是短暂的，但就是这有限的几十年，我们好好利用了吗？“少时心在父母，壮时心系妻室，老则心忧儿孙”，留给自己的那么一点时间，还是在追名逐利。死亡到来时才发现，我们消耗生命换取的财富和地位，我们为付出全部感情的亲人，根本不能用来挽回生命。甚至连这个朝夕与共的身体也带不走。

古德说：“能知暇满大义利，则知悔作无意义事；能知难得此人身，则知悔作放逸事；能知死无常，则一切不利于死与法相违之事，绝不乐为。”有念死之心，才能生起舍世心；有舍世之心，才能生起求法意乐。有了法的指引，我们才能在每个人生阶段作出正确抉择，在每个当下都不空过。不论座上还是座下，不论修行闻法还是工作生活，心都能和善法相应。

(2) 通过临终关怀给生命以指引

佛教非常重视临终关怀，其意义主要有两方面。对临终者来说，能否在最后关头安住正念，是蒙佛接引、顺利往生的关键，直接关系到未来去向。虽然功夫主要靠平时积累，但在这一刻，四大分离的痛苦，业力现前的障碍，都会形成巨大的干扰，甚至使人功亏一篑。所以多数人并没有十分的把握，这就需要他人的共同护持和成就。

比如对临终者进行心理引导，帮助他放下对生的留恋，提起对净土的向往。同时和临终者一起称念佛号，强化信心，祈请阿弥陀佛的慈悲接引。

对助念者来说，临终关怀则是策励修行、践行菩提心的良机。凡夫是很容易麻木的，仅仅在理上念死，可能要不了多久就没感觉了，这就需要通过不断思维来强化。参与临终关怀，是以活生生的实例提醒自己，死神随时都在那里等着，不知什么时候就会把自己抓走。如果没有做好充分准备，一旦死神现前，我们会以怎样的心态面对，未来会去哪里，有把握吗？

所以说，佛教既重视现实人生，也重视未来去向。因为人生是修行的立足点，必须牢牢把握机会，以这个身份听闻正法，精进修行。但今生是短暂的，而且轮回路险，稍有不慎就会堕落。这就必须关注死后的归宿，或是往生极乐，不再退转；或是带着愿力再入娑婆，成为来生修行的起点。而念死则介于两者之间，既是为了更加珍惜生命，也是为了对未来做好准备，当这一天真正到来时，能够安然接纳，视死如归。

五、自利还是利他

佛教提倡自利和利他的统一
前提是有智慧，有慈悲
如果没有智慧
自利尚且不能，遑论利他
如果没有慈悲
最多就是随缘利他
而不会当作自己不可推卸的责任
没有广大的利他心
也无法究竟地自利

作为社会的一分子，我们都有各自应尽的责任，佛弟子也不例外。遗憾的是，社会上不少人认为佛教徒是自私自利的，指责出家人抛家别子，只图个人清闲，不顾念养育之恩，不承担家庭责任，不关心社会疾苦。虽然这些年来，随着各种弘法活动的普及，这一印象已经有所改变，但难以从根本上扭转。当一个人要出家时，父母会认为他是忘恩还是报恩？社会会认为他是逃避还是承担？那么，佛教徒究竟是自利还是利他的？关于这个问题，首先要从什么是利益说起。

1. 何为利益

世人奋斗目标不同，但都是为了获取利益，所谓“天下熙熙，皆为利来；天下攘攘，皆为利往”。从小处说，

有情生存离不开物质基础。不论古代的自给自足，以物易物，还是现在的工业生产，商品流通，都是对利益的获取和交换。从大处说，个人的地位、权势、荣誉，以及国家的资源、领土、主权，也属于利益的范围。总之，凡是能满足自身欲望的事物，均可称为利益。所以对利益的追逐贯穿了整个人类历史，并促进了社会发展，提高了人们的生活水平。

作为佛教徒，同样无法回避利益。即使不事生产的出家人，也要具足“饮食、三衣、卧具、药物”四事供养，所以有“法轮未转，食轮先转”之说。作为寺院来说，一方面要保障出家人安心办道，一方面要面向社会弘扬佛法，这都需要相应的建设和投入。

除了物质利益，佛教中也经常说到法的利益，包括现前利益和究竟利益。佛陀还经常告诫弟子们，在自己得到利益的同时，还要饶益有情，让更多众生受益。所以佛教并不避谈利益，而且认为利益和人生有着密切关系。那么，我们应该如何看待利益？

2. 义和利的关系

说到利益，离不开欲望和道德。如果说欲望是人类逐利的动力，那么道德就是起到约束的作用。因为欲望是

无止境的，对利益的追求也是无止境的。如果不加规范，这种追求很快就会失控，进而导致一系列乱象，甚至是犯罪行为。这种唯利是图的危害，在今天比比皆是。可以说，每个人都或多或少地成为受害者，也往往直接或间接地成为施害者。那么，利益和道德是否对立，是否如鱼和熊掌般不可兼得？

早在春秋战国时期，就有关于义利之辩的记载。《论语》中，有“君子喻于义，小人喻于利”之说，把义和利分别对应为君子和小人，似乎是两组完全对立的关系。《孟子》中，梁惠王对远道而来的孟子说：你怎样才能对我的国家有利？孟子却认为，如果只维护自身利益，诸侯间的矛盾会更趋尖锐，主张以道德治理国家，所以“王何必曰利？亦有仁义而已矣”。这也使道德和利益形成对立。

在儒家传统文化的大环境下，人们是推崇道德的。如果两者对立，就意味着，要追求道德只能放弃利益。从而带来一个弊端：有些人明明在乎利益，但又在乎仁义道德的形象，结果成了心口不一的伪君子。

那么，义和利真的非此即彼吗？佛教认为，关键是以什么手段获利。如果我们不择手段地追求利益，那么利益和道德确实是对立的。这样的话，我们不仅会失去道德，利益也不会长久。反之，如果我们遵循道德，如法求

财，那么两者非但没有冲突，而且所得利益会因为建立在道德基础上，能够不断增长。

比如我们在经营中讲诚信，有爱心，考虑对方利益，争取双赢，对方必然愿意和你长期合作。中国人推崇货真价实，童叟无欺，这样才能取信于人。那些流传至今的老字号，包括国外的百年老店，无不是诚信经营的典范。这些规则在赢得社会认可的同时，也成为他们的生财之道。可以说，这是利益和道德的双赢，是做事和做人的双赢。不仅使自己和他人得到利益，更能惠及未来。

总之，义和利并非对立，而是相互依存和增上的。道德是追求利益应当遵循的原则，而利益则是道德实践的果实。求利而不忘义，才能使利益更长久。

3. 佛教如何看待利益

(1) 佛教排斥利益吗

我们知道，佛陀当年是放弃王位出家修行的。在学佛者中，不仅出家必须成为彻底的无产者，包括部分在家居士，也在学佛后放下事业，全身心地投入修行。有人因此认为，佛教是不讲利益，甚至排斥利益的。事实如何呢？

首先，佛教不排斥对正当利益的追求。尤其是在家

人，通过合法途径和辛勤劳动获得的财富，经中称为净财。可以在解决自己生活所需的同时，作为造福众生、广修善行的资粮。前提是符合法律和戒律（道德）的双重标准。从这一点来看，佛教徒特别要慎重选择职业。有些居士热心布施，乐于助印经书，建寺塑佛，却不注意自己的职业是否如法。还有些人明明知道自己做得不对，不符合五戒，却想当然地认为，只要拿些钱供养三宝，就可以将功赎罪。其实两者各有因果，不能替代。如果不在因上调整，很可能是得不偿失的。

除了有形的物质利益，佛教还重视善行的利益，重视无形的功德法财。所谓善行，不仅有益于自己，还有益于他人；不仅对现在有益，还能惠及未来。所谓功德法财，就是学佛的利益。《金刚经》中，佛陀就通过七次较量功德告诉我们：“若三千大千世界中，所有诸须弥山王，如是等七宝聚，有人持用布施，若人以此般若波罗蜜经，乃至四句偈等，受持读诵，为他人说，于前福德百分不及一，百千万亿分，乃至算数譬喻，所不能及。”简单地说，就是读诵受持《金刚经》，比任何布施获得的利益更大。在《普贤行愿品》《地藏经》等经典中，也有类似说明。

因为智慧比财富更有价值。物质利益是有限的，即使再有钱，也未必没有烦恼，未必能过得幸福。但一个

有智慧的人，不论在什么境况下，都是自在安乐的。不仅现前安乐，还能获得究竟安乐，成就世间和出世间一切功德。明白这个道理，我们就能理解《金刚经》所说的利益了。

还有一点需要强调的是，佛教既提倡利益，又让我们放下执著，也就是《金刚经》所说的三轮体空。首先是没有布施的我相，没有高高在上的优越感；其次是对受施者没有爱憎亲疏的分别，一视同仁；第三是不计较物品贵贱，对方需要就慷慨施舍。这样的布施才是圆满的。不执著利益，不等于没有利益。相反，正因为不住相，所得利益才能广大无边，不可思议。

(2) 学佛仅仅是自利吗

在世人眼中，佛教徒四大皆空，除了个人修行，完全不关心社会。这种看法有失偏颇。佛教有小乘和大乘之分，又称声闻乘和菩萨乘。乘是指运载工具，声闻乘就像小船，只能自己坐，偏向自利；而菩萨乘就像大船，能接引一切众生到达彼岸，是自利利他的。这种区别主要体现在他们的发心。因为发心不同，能够利益的对象也不同。

声闻行者发出离心，“观三界如火宅，视生死如冤家”，急于证悟涅槃，不再轮回。所以又被称为“自了汉”，

似乎他们是完全不顾人间疾苦的。事实上，声闻行者也修慈悲喜舍四无量心。在今天的南传佛教地区，僧团依然和社会有着密切互动，在弘法利生、教化大众方面起到了积极作用。之所以说他们偏向自利，只是和菩萨道的要求相比，他们没有将利他作为自己不可推卸的责任，也没有尽未来际利益众生的愿心。但这种自利，和世人理解的自私自利有着本质的区别，这是我们特别要注意的。

而菩萨行者不仅要发出离心，断除烦恼，更要在此基础上发菩提心，以利益众生为使命。这种利他心是无限的，在空间上，遍及十方；在时间上，尽未来际。从某种意义上说，菩提心正是出离心的延伸和圆满。

4. 自利与利他

自利是一切从个人利益出发，利他则是处处为别人着想。很多人以为自利和利他是矛盾的。若是满足他人利益，必然会损害自身利益，反之也是同样。那么，自利和利他是不是对立的呢？

(1) 自私不等于自利

从社会的角度来说，正当的自利也是可以利益他人的。比如今天每个人的生存，都必须依赖他人的劳动，与

此同时，我们的劳动也在被更多的人分享。不论从事什么职业，都彼此依存，相互利益。包括现在提倡的双赢，同样是自利和利他的统一。

但对某些人来说，自利就意味着多赚钱，为此可以不择手段，坑蒙拐骗。确切地说，这样的行为属于自私，而不是自利。因为这些行为不仅会直接或间接地伤害他人，而且在制造不善的因，终究会让自己承受苦果。如果为了赚钱把心做坏了，这种损失是不可挽回的，远比把身体做坏了更糟糕。因为身体的使用寿命有限，但不良心行留下的种子，会在未来继续产生作用。所以自私不可能自利，恰恰是自己害了自己，而且会危害未来。

(2) 众生只知自利，不得解脱

真正利益自己，必须有大智慧，否则很容易事与愿违。明明为自己做了很多事，机关算尽，反而给人生带来更多问题。因为在我们生命中当家做主的不是其他，是贪嗔痴，是错误观念和混乱情绪，这就使得我们总是作出颠倒而非正确的选择。

世人由于对我的执著，进一步执著我的钱财、事业、家庭，念念都以自我为中心。只要对我有利，就不惜损害他人。如政界的勾心斗角，商界的尔虞我诈，即使在被称

为象牙塔的校园，现在也为评职称、争项目而明争暗斗，使心不得安宁。

也有人说，只要不损害别人就行了，为什么还要利他？他们虽然条件优越，却只知挥霍享乐，终日消耗福报；或以守财为乐，使财富失去应有用途。这么做看似维护了自身利益，其实在精神上贫乏得可怜。而且总是担心有人算计自己，患得患失，反而被钱财所累。

(3) 菩萨一心利他，得大自在

《道次第》告诉我们：我执是一切衰损之门，利他是一切功德之本。个中原理，宗大师举了两个例子。众生无始以来都想着自己，结果制造了无尽的迷惑和痛苦；佛菩萨一心想着众生，以利益众生为己任，反而能在利他中成就自己，圆满慈悲和智慧。这就充分说明，自私未必能自利，无私才能自利。

我们为众生所作的一切，无不是在成就自己的道业。这就必须放下我执，以无我的胸怀接纳众生，把众生的需要当作自己不容推卸的责任，实现“不为自己求安乐，但愿众生得离苦”的菩萨行愿。

(4) 自利和利他是统一的

以前有句话叫“毫不利己，专门利人”，并以此作为道德的最高标杆。其实在佛教看来，自利和利他是统一的。佛教否定的是自私，并不是自利。

首先，利他必须建立在自利的基础上。因为帮助他人需要智慧和能力，否则的话，非但不能给对方有效帮助，还可能让对方起烦恼，自己也陷入其中，结果“泥菩萨过河，自身难保”。所以佛教不仅提倡慈悲，更提倡智慧。如果没有智慧引导，只是出于感性的“滥慈悲”，很可能对自他双方都没有利益。所以菩提心（利他）必须以出离心（自利）为前提，这样才能在利他过程中保持超然的心态，看清各种因缘，因势利导。

其次，究竟的自利必须通过利他来完成。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。”告诉我们，如果不利益众生，将不能成就大慈大悲，不能成就佛果。

慈悲和智慧是菩萨道修行的两大核心。通常，我们认为利他可以长养慈悲，而智慧必须通过空性修行来成就。事实上，利他也可以破除我执，增长智慧。因为我执就是对自我的错误认定，然后还会不断复制和强化，使我

们越来越找不到自己。学佛最难的就是破除我执，如果光靠空性禅修，不少人会用不上力。而借助纯粹的利他行，在关注众生的过程中，我执也会不断被弱化。

从这个意义上说，利他正是究竟的自利。这是佛菩萨以甚深智慧证悟后，为我们指出的修行方法。如果处以自我为中心，既无法自利，更不能利他。就像父母和儿女之间，要么把儿女宠坏了，使他们培养了种种不良习气；要么和儿女关系紧张，彼此不能正常沟通。这都是因为缺乏智慧，不了解对方的需求，一味从自己感觉出发造成的。包括在社会上做慈善等，同样需要智慧，否则就容易做得力不从心，甚至带来更多的社会问题。

总之，佛教提倡自利和利他的统一，前提是有智慧，有慈悲。如果没有智慧，自利尚且不能，遑论利他。如果没有慈悲，最多就是随缘利他，而不会当作自己不可推卸的责任。没有广大的利他心，也无法究竟地自利。所以佛陀才能在证悟智慧后成就慈悲，才能在自利后，进一步利益众生，觉行圆满。

六、出世还是入世

佛弟子既要通达有为法的虚幻
有出世的超然
同时也要对众生有无限的慈悲
积极地入世度众
没有出世之心
入世就会被五欲六尘所染
没有入世之心
就不能践行菩萨道的慈悲
不能彰显大乘佛教的真精神

寺院，向来是方外之地，红尘不到；出家，则被称为斩断俗缘，割爱辞亲。“古木无人径，深山何处钟”“曲径通幽处，禅房花木深”等禅诗，也向人们传递了清凉、寂静的出世气息。在这些描述中，寺院和僧人仿佛有着某种超凡脱俗的神秘气息。但今天的佛教界，不少道场正积极开展弘法、慈善、文化等事业，活动丰富多彩，内容与时俱进。且面向企业界、文艺界、心理学界等各个领域，在社会上影响甚广。从这个角度看，寺院又像是教育机构，向民众传播人生的智慧，调心的方法。那么，出家人到底是出世还是入世的呢？

探讨这个问题前，首先要了解，佛教所说的“世界”是什么。《楞严经》云：“世为迁流，界为方位。”迁流指时间，包含过去、现在、未来三世；方位指空间，包含

东、西、南、北、东南、东北、西南、西北、上方、下方，又称十方三世。可见，世界就是时间加上空间。

我们平时说到世界，通常是指这个地球。而在佛经的描述中，世界之多有如恒河沙数，无量无边。我们所在的娑婆世界，由欲界、色界、无色界构成。其中的生命种类包括天、人、阿修罗、地狱、饿鬼、畜生六道，大多属于欲界，还有部分天人在色界天和无色界天。

有情会看到什么样的世界，取决于自身的认识能力。从人类来说，就是六根和六识。即眼睛看到的，耳朵听到的，鼻子闻到的，舌头尝到的，身体接触到的，思维认识到的。也就是说，我们只能看到自己认识范围内的世界。但透过感官认识的部分非常有限，并非世界真相。

比如我们年少时看到的世界，一定和现在不同，因为你的认识能力改变了。此外，受过不同教育，从事不同职业，具有不同生命经验等，都会影响我们认识世界的深度和广度。古人说“读万卷书，行万里路”，就是通过这两个途径，帮助自己尽可能地拓宽眼界，提升对世界的认识。

1. 大众对世界的态度

对世界的态度，就是通常所说的世界观。很多人觉得这个概念有些抽象，属于哲学问题，似乎和现实人生关

系不大。事实上，这种态度会直接影响到我们的选择和行为。因为一个人说什么，做什么，都不是无缘无故产生的，而是来自思想认识。追根溯源，就是我们的人生观、世界观和价值观。三观虽有不同侧重，但在根本上是一致的。如果认识有偏差，就会使我们作出错误的选择、不当的行为，所以正确的世界观非常重要。

那么，大众对世界的态度是怎样的呢？下面介绍两种比较有代表性的观点。

(1) 贪 著

凡夫对世界充满贪著。首先是对自我的贪著，这也是人类的最大贪著。其次是对财富、地位、家庭、感情，以及我们拥有的一切的贪著。佛教称为我和我所。

佛陀悟道后发现，世间一切都是缘起的假相，条件具备就存在，条件败坏就消失，所谓“诸法因缘生，诸法因缘灭”。“我”的存在也是同样，不过是色、受、想、行、识五蕴的和合。但凡夫因为无明，会把种种非我的东西执著为“我”。比如以身体代表我，以身份代表我，等等。其实这些和我们只有暂时的关系。

为什么我们会把这些当作“我”的存在？因为把自己丢了，所以才四处抓取；又因为不了解自己的本来面

目，所以才会寻找各种替代品，并信以为真。成立“我”之后，我们还需要进一步寻找支撑，要财富，要感情，要家庭，要人际关系，把和我有关的一切执以为我所。有了这份认定之后，执著随之而生，形成深深的依赖。

既然这些代表“我”的存在，就意味着它们很重要。一旦失去，“我”就会受到影响，甚至彻底倒塌，所以我们希望与己有关的事物永恒不变。可世间是无常的，这个真相会不断冲击我们的设定，让人看到一切都是暂时的，都要经历成住坏空的过程。这些变化本是正常的，就像春去秋来，花开花落，但因为有了永恒的幻想，我们就会担心失去，焦虑而没有安全感，也就是《心经》所说的挂碍、恐怖、颠倒梦想。

在这个世间，每一秒都有人出生，有人去世，有各种事故甚至灾难发生，但未必会对我们产生多少影响。能够影响我们的，只是那些和我们有关的，尤其是我们贪著的部分。贪著的对象越多，受到影响的概率就越高；贪著的程度越强烈，带来的烦恼就越重。

(2) 厌离

和贪著相反的是厌离，对什么都没有兴趣。比如近年流行的“丧文化”，就是指年轻人没有目标，失去希望，

颓废而麻木地生存着。为什么这种非主流的状况会逐渐普及，甚至成为时代病？

首先，追逐五欲是很辛苦的，一旦享乐超出所需，就会带来身心两方面的负担。正如老子所说，“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”。在今天这个物质极大丰富的时代，人们一方面被物质所刺激，一方面也因太多的刺激而疲惫。其次，现代社会的生活水准日益提高，生存压力也随之增长。因为竞争激烈，很多人在生活和工作中屡屡受挫，求而不得，不免走向另一个极端。第三，有人生性清高，看到世间的污浊，出于对自我的保护，与社会保持距离，不愿同流合污。第四，因为看到世界的荒谬和生命的虚幻，觉得追求什么都没意义，没兴趣，甚至找不到活着的理由。

其实这两种态度古已有之，只是在今天表现得特别突出而已。

2. 宗教对世界的态度

(1) 其他宗教的态度

那么，其他宗教是怎么看世界的呢？西方的基督教认为，尘世是短暂而虚幻的，天堂才是永恒的归宿。生

活在世上，要信仰上帝，多行善事，最后就能进天堂，得永生。

而在东方的印度，婆罗门教已有三千多年历史，后演变为印度教，流传至今，属于主流信仰。此外还有各种宗教，佛陀在世时就有九十六种外道。这些宗教有不同的修行方式和宗教体验，但主要是以轮回与解脱为核心。一方面对轮回作出解释，一方面提出如何解脱的方法。这些宗教普遍认为世间是痛苦而虚幻的，所以有一种出世情怀。

(2) 佛教的态度

佛教的出家制度，使很多人觉得佛教是厌世的，否则为什么要放弃世俗的享乐和追求？在各种文学作品中，也往往把出家之因归为仕途失意或感情挫折。这种现象固然存在，但以此判断佛教厌世，是片面的。

因为真正的出家绝不是遇挫后的无奈躲避，而是看到世间真相后的主动超越。凡夫因为无明惑业，都活在贪嗔痴的串习中。这是心灵世界的三大病毒，早已成为生命的主导力量，源源不断地制造痛苦，制造生死，制造轮回。出家是基于对未来生命的负责——我要摆脱无明，证悟真理。为此，必须放下贪著，排除干扰，全身心地精进

修行。这需要极大的智慧和勇气。

古人说：“出家乃大丈夫之事，非将相之所能为也。”因为将相只需要战胜敌人，出家则是要战胜自己的凡夫习气。而人生最大的对手不是别人，正是自己。为了达成这个目标，必须忍常人所不能忍，行常人所不能行。尤其在今天这个物欲横流的时代，诱惑无处不在，修行比任何时代都艰难得多。

但我们要知道，佛教所说的放下，是对贪著的出离，不是厌世，不是和世界断绝关系，而是获得超然的心态，所谓“处世界，如虚空，如莲花，不著水”。可见出离和厌世的根本不同在于，出离是积极的，主动的；厌世是消极的，被动的。

3. 以出世心做入世事

对于大乘佛子来说，不仅要发出离心，还要发菩提心；不仅要成就智慧，断除烦恼，还要成就慈悲，广度众生。慈是与乐，众生缺乏快乐，菩萨就帮助众生获得快乐；悲是拔苦，众生深陷苦海，菩萨就帮助众生摆脱痛苦。

菩萨不仅要修慈悲，还要成就观音菩萨那样的大慈大悲。每个人都有或多或少的慈悲，所以我们对慈悲的修

行往往不太以为然，觉得没有多少难度，不是禅修那种听起来就特别吸引人的方式。事实上，慈悲的修行并不容易，真正的难度是在于这个“大”。要“大”到什么程度？是对一切众生心怀慈悲，没有任何众生不是菩萨慈悲的对象。只要还有一个众生是你不愿帮助的，就说明慈悲尚未圆满。

当然这并不意味着，菩萨能把一切众生从痛苦中拯救出来。因为帮助众生需要因缘，即使菩萨发心利他，对方还未必愿意，或是其他因缘不具足。所以关键在于，能否对一切众生发起慈悲心，这是主观因素，也是检验修行的标准。大慈大悲的另一种表述，是“无缘大慈，同体大悲”。所谓无缘，是对众生平等看待，没有亲疏之别；所谓同体，是把众生和自己视为一体，没有彼此之分。

这种慈悲是基于空性慧产生的。菩萨了知一切如幻如化，没有我，也没有我所，才能对众生生起清净无染的广大慈悲，才能深刻感受到自己和众生是一体的，才会不遗余力地帮助对方，但内心没有我相，没有众生相。《金刚经》说，菩萨要度一切众生，不论胎生、卵生、湿生、化生，还是有色、无色，有想、无想，非有想非无想……都是菩萨救度的对象。但在菩萨内心，实无众生得灭度者。也就是说，既要度化无量众生，又不会执著众生的

相。如果没有这个境界，就很容易被事相所转。

所以说，利益众生必须具备两个要点。一方面要发心纯正，不是为了沽名钓誉，或是为了任何其他目的而做，纯粹是为了帮助他人；一方面还要有智慧，虽然倾力帮助众生，但内心是超然的，没有我相，没有被帮助者，也没有帮助这件事。站在这样的高度，才是圆满的菩萨行，是没有任何副作用的。否则，虽然我们做的是利他善行，也可能做得苦苦恼恼，难以为继。这正是菩萨行和世间慈善的根本区别。

所以，佛弟子既要通达有为法的虚幻，有出世的超然，同时也要对众生有无限的慈悲，积极地入世度众。没有出世之心，入世就会被五欲六尘所染，处处挂碍，不能自拔；没有入世之心，就不能践行菩萨道的慈悲，不能彰显大乘佛教的真精神。

七、无情还是多情

从佛教角度来看
众生都是我们轮回中的亲人
所谓“一切男子是我父
一切女人是我母
我生生无不从之受生”
既然众生都是自己的
父母、兄弟、姐妹
有什么理由不对他们心怀慈悲

佛教把人类叫作有情，就是有情识的生命。包括所有的动物等，都属于有情的范畴。情，是人类最为重要的心理之一，也是艺术作品中长盛不衰的主题。从文学到音乐、绘画、雕塑等，人们以各种形式抒发并传递情感。包括那些纪念性建筑，也被赋予表达情感的功能。古今中外，世界各地，虽然人们的语言不通，文化背景不同，但并不妨碍我们观赏艺术作品，也不妨碍我们心生共鸣，为之感动。因为其中蕴含的情感是相通的，是超越时空的。

1. 情为何物

中国人重视“知、情、意”。知是思想认识，情是情感，意是意志。现代社会考量一个人能否成功，开始觉得智商和意志很重要，后来才发现情商更重要。有人智商

很高，意志坚强，却不会和人相处，给自己的职业规划和成长道路带来种种障碍。情商是认识和管理情绪的能力，具备这样的善巧，和人相处时就能保持合适的状态，使对方如沐春风，心生欢喜。

关于情，我们常说的有七情六欲。七情，是喜、怒、忧、惧、爱、憎、欲七种主要情绪。关于这个问题，儒家、中医和佛教的说法大同小异。六欲，是由眼、耳、鼻、舌、身、意六根产生的身心需求，也属于情的范围。情不仅是今生的重要内容，让人欢喜让人忧，也是轮回的关键，所谓情不重不生娑婆，爱不深不堕轮回。

此外，感情也因对象不同而有区别。首先是物情，是对物品和生活环境的感情。我们会对自己拥有的东西、居住的环境产生感情。其中包括对这个对象本身的感情，也包括由此引发的对某段生活的感情。这种感情有趋新和恋旧两个面向。趋新自不必说，是多数人的本能。但恋旧者也大有人在，所以才会有那么多人喜欢收藏老物件，而乡情也是自古以来被人用各种方式记录并怀念的。

其次是人与人之间的感情，包括亲情、友情、爱情等。亲情带有血缘关系，是人来到世间自然形成的，相对来说也是最稳定的，所谓血浓于水。友情是朋友之间的感情，有从小相伴的少年情谊，有为共同理想走到一起的志

同道合者，也有因缘甚深的忘年交，还有高山流水遇知音的心灵相契。至于爱情，通常是所有感情中最强烈也最易变的。这在古今中外的文学、影视作品中有大量描述，也是人们重要的生活经历。

情构成了世间生活的常态。人在建立各种感情的过程中，又会生起深深的贪著，从而演化出无数的悲欢离合、爱恨情仇。

2. 佛教怎么看待情爱

在佛教看来，情有以下几个特点。

第一是痴，就是无明，看不清楚。有个词叫作“痴情”，可谓一语道破。因为痴，所以没道理可讲。有道是，“情不知所起，一往而深”。古往今来，多少痴男怨女为了一个情字，万般痛苦，甚至走上绝路。因为这些情是在妄心基础上建立的，如果缺乏智慧，是很难看清真相的。如果自己不想醒来，也很难接受别人的规劝。

第二是贪，具有粘著的特点。不论对恋人，还是亲人、朋友的感情，当你在爱对方的时候，同时也在建立对爱的需求；当你说“我爱你”的时候，其实在告诉对方“你也要爱我”。投入的感情越多，由此产生的需要和期待就越高。男女之间是这样，父母对儿女也是这样。

爱之所以会成为系缚，就是因为粘著像胶水那样，把双方粘在一起。

在不断投入感情的过程中，粘著程度会随之增加，对爱的需求也在增加。当你对他人的爱有一分，内心会建立一分的需求；有十分的爱，会建立十分的需求；有一百分的爱，会建立一百分的需求。这些需求必须通过对方的回馈，才能得到满足和平衡。但随着需求的不断提升，得到同等回馈的概率就越低。当付出和所得之间的悬殊越来越大，痛苦就随之降临了。

第三是我执，是从自我出发的一份占有。尤其是父母对儿女的爱，以及男女之间的爱情，特别容易引发占有欲，进而是控制欲。这是破坏彼此关系的大敌，也是直接引发痛苦的导火索。因为控制会带来逆反心理，并进一步造成冲突。同时会因为害怕失去，带来焦虑、恐惧、胡思乱想等各种负面情绪。一旦这种关系发生变化，还会因为对方的“背叛”激起嗔心。这种因爱生恨的悲剧，世间已经发生太多了。

佛陀在菩提树下悟道时发现，生命延续有十二个环节，即十二缘起。其中最重要的力量就是无明和爱取。无明是轮回之本，由此引发其后的一系列问题。那么，爱取起到什么作用呢？有情投胎来到世界，是通过眼、耳、

鼻、舌、身、意六个窗口接触外境。在六根面对色、声、香、味、触、法六尘时，我们会产生不同觉受。如果在这个环节不能保持正念，就很容易随着习气，对带来乐受的境界产生执取，对带来苦受的境界心生嗔恨。事实上，六尘只是对境而已，它所能产生的影响，完全取决于我们的心。如果我们对六尘境界没有粘著，外境是左右不了我们的。

众生之所以被绑在轮回中，不得解脱，正是因为这份贪爱。可以说，情就像一根绳子，我们在乎什么，就被什么所捆绑。佛法告诉我们，众生在轮回中，“无明所缚，爱结所系，长夜轮回，不知苦之本性。”总之，人间的情爱是以痴、贪、我执为特点。但情并不都是负面的，否则我们就和木石无异了，那是无法修行的。佛菩萨的大慈大悲就属于情的升华，是从染污、有限、粘著的情爱，升华到平等、无限、清净的大爱。所以关键是以智慧认识情的真相，避免痴、贪、我执等问题，进而加以管理和提升。

3. 学佛是对众生的大爱

(1) 学佛是无情吗

出家要放弃对世俗情感的占有，不论亲情、爱情还

是物情，统统都要放下。从世人的角度看，似乎是无情的。但我们需要去了解，出家为什么要放弃这些？前面讲到，世俗情感是以痴、贪、我执为基础，是生死轮回之因，也是无尽烦恼之因。放下这些，不是变成木头，而是要建立没有染污的情感。

在僧团中，出家人之间有没有情感呢？佛弟子对三宝有没有情感呢？当然是有的。这叫法情，是建立在信仰和恭敬的基础上，是没有染污的。出家人不仅要對三宝、师长、道友建立没有染污的情感，还要对一切众生心生慈悲。这种情感必须建立在智慧认识的基础上，无我的基础上，而不是建立在痴、贪、我执的基础上。两者是完全不同的。

想建立没有染污的情感，前提是放下染污的情感。想想我们在世间拥有的情感，维持起来是不是很辛苦？尤其在今天这个社会，于自身，缺乏道德约束；于外境，充满声色诱惑。可以说，感情正面临前所未有的考验。如果彼此之间没有相当的信任，很容易因为猜忌而产生矛盾、争执，甚至是犯罪。当这种辛苦积累到一定程度后，你会很向往没有染污的情感。

情感也是缘起法，关键是我们怎么看待，怎么相处。在学佛过程中，用佛法智慧调整认识，改变心态，可以逐

步增加没有染污的情感，逐步减少有染污的情感。善缘具足的话，还可以把世间伴侣变成菩提眷属，建设清静、和谐的佛化家庭。

(2) 多情乃佛心

有句话叫作“多情乃佛心”。这个多情，不是通常所说的多愁善感或滥爱，而是对众生的大慈大悲，是平等、清静、无限的大爱。我们在世间能爱几个人？一个家庭？一个团队？如果能爱一个城市、一个国家，就很了不起了，但发菩提心，是发愿利益一切众生，帮助一切众生离苦得乐。包括全人类，包括所有动物，也包括天人乃至地狱众生。这种崇高的利他主义愿望，正是来自对众生广大无边的爱。

进一步，还要尽未来际地践行这种大爱。在《普贤行愿品》每个大愿的最后，都有这样几句话：“如是虚空界尽，众生界尽，众生业尽，众生烦恼尽，我此愿望无有穷尽。念念相续，无有间断，身语意业，无有疲厌。”这是佛菩萨对一切众生的庄严承诺。与之相比，世间的海誓山盟算得了什么？

可见，佛弟子非但不是无情，而且具有慈悲大爱。因为从佛教角度来看，众生都是我们轮回中的亲人，所谓

“一切男子是我父，一切女人是我母，我生生无不从之受生”。既然众生都是自己的父母、兄弟、姐妹，有什么理由不爱他们，不对他们心怀慈悲？有什么理由不帮助他们离苦得乐？

佛菩萨正是这种大爱的典范。这种爱是智慧的，没有无明和我执；这种爱是清净的，没有染污和占有；这种爱是平等的，没有亲疏和分别；这种爱是无限的，就像阳光普照一切，大地承载万物，没有任何众生被排除在外。

八、随缘还是进取

不论世间还是出世间的成就
都要在看清缘起的前提下
顺势而为，精进努力
所以，随缘和进取是不矛盾的
学习并运用缘起的智慧
才能跳出主观的错误认识，放下我执
从更高的角度认识一切

现在有个网络流行词叫“佛系”，泛指怎么都行、看淡一切的生活方式，并衍生出佛系青年、佛系父母、佛系生活等一系列用语。这种调侃虽然没有多少恶意，本身也不是针对佛教的，但因为网络传播速度快而覆盖面广，迅速成为时下对佛教最新也最为普遍的误读。之所以出现这个情况，可能和“随缘”的概念有关，是把随缘理解为无所谓，随它去。事实上，佛教所说的随缘完全不是这样。

1. 学佛首先要认识因缘

“随缘”的缘，出自因缘一词。佛教的基本理论就是因缘因果，所谓“诸法因缘生，诸法因缘灭”。其中，因指内在的主因，缘指外在的助缘。由因感果，需要缘的推动。如果相关的缘不具足，因就暂时不会发展为果。就像

种子，如果没有泥土、水分等助缘，是不会发芽结果的。

佛教不是偶然论，认为一切是偶然出现的；不是宿命论，认为一切是前世注定的；也不是神造论，认为万物由造物主创造并决定；而是缘起论，认为事物“此有故彼有，此生故彼生，此无故彼无，此灭故彼灭”。也就是说，一切存在都是条件和关系的假相，是相互影响的。

汉传佛教华严宗的教理中，把缘起思想发挥到极致，认为“一即一切”。也就是说，宇宙中任何一个点都和整个宇宙有关，蕴藏着宇宙的一切内涵。现代科学提出的全息观、蝴蝶效应等，也说明宇宙是一个整体，是息息相关的。其中蕴含着无尽的缘起，包括清净的因缘，染污的因缘。

我们看到的世界，取决于自身的认识能力，同时也离不开我们的感觉、经验和需要。所以这种认识并不客观，会受到各种因素的影响。现在社会上出现的“六顶思考帽”之类，就是针对个人局限而开发的思维训练模式，通过集思广益，充分发挥大众的智慧。因为个人经验会有很大的片面性，如果大家能提供不同的思考角度，再把这些角度综合起来，就能更为全面而客观地认识这件事，以及相关的因缘。

2. 随缘和进取

(1) 何为随缘

随缘是解决什么问题呢？我经常写这四个字——随缘无我，或无我随缘。可见，随缘不是随我，更不是随便，不是随性而为。随缘的前提，是跳出自我的感觉，以理性、开放的心态看清各种因缘，然后作出智慧的选择。这是主动而非被动的，是明确而非模棱两可的。不是什么缘出现就跟着什么缘跑，别人叫你做什么就做什么。

可能有人会说：佛教中不是说要“随顺众生”吗？须知，这种随顺并不是对众生百依百顺，不然众生要造恶业的时候，难道还成为他们的帮凶吗？所谓“随顺众生”，是在看清因缘的情况下，知道什么样的引导最适合对方。从这个角度切入，首先让对方欢喜，然后善巧引导，最终还是为了利益众生。世间盲目的顺从，比如父母因为溺爱子女，要什么给什么，往往是有害无益的。

随缘的智慧非常重要，不论世间法还是出世间法的成就，都离不开对因缘的如实观察。对客观条件充分评估之后，才能作出正确选择。

(2) 随缘和进取

人们通常觉得，进取才是努力，随缘代表着消极、不作为。这是对随缘的错误认识。事实上，随缘才能更好地进取。如果没有缘起的智慧，对事情没有全面、客观的认识，很多时候，我们的进取是徒劳无功的。经常有人抱怨：“我已经这么努力，为什么还不成功？”之所以会这样，就是缺乏随缘的智慧。一方面，你的努力方向对不对？如果南辕北辙，怎么努力都是不可能成功的；另一方面，你的努力只代表了其中一部分因缘，而成功还需要众缘和合。可能还有一些因缘，是你没看到或做不到的。看清这一点，我们在尽到自己努力之后，就不会有无谓的烦恼了。

如果从佛教的角度解读，世人所说的审时度势，正是随缘的前提。这是代表我们在做一件事情时，有客观的评估，采取正确的方法，那样的努力进取，才会事半功倍。反过来说，如果我们对事情缺乏客观认识和有效手段，可能花十分力气，只有一分的收获。可见，随缘和进取是相辅相成的。

我们想一想，在世间做任何事，是不是都需要有这种智慧？首先是明确目标，然后就要随顺当下的因缘，采取与之相应的方法。其实修行也是同样。我们知道，

佛陀针对众生不同的根机，说三乘佛法，说八万四千法门。这也是随缘，是随顺众生的不同因缘，给予最适合他们的教化。

3. 随缘对修行和人生的意义

佛教发源于印度，在这片土地上，宗教和哲学极其发达。为什么在众多的教派和宗教中，只有佛陀找到了觉醒之道，找到了解除痛苦的方法？关键在于，佛陀找到了轮回真正的因。

人生有种种痛苦，可以说，五千年文明都在以各种方式解决痛苦。从远古的刀耕火种，到今天的人工智能，物质条件比过去有了巨大改善。我们今天的很多享乐，是古人做梦都想不到的，但痛苦和烦恼并没有因此减少。从某个角度说，甚至变得更多。我们不再有饥寒交迫的痛苦，但精神的匮乏不是饥饿吗？人与人之间的冷漠，不是让我们感到心寒吗？

我们要解决痛苦，就要从智慧的高度，找到真正的痛苦之因。佛法告诉我们，所有痛苦都来自内心的贪婪、仇恨、愚痴，这才是根源所在。由此，还会产生嫉妒、焦虑、孤独、没有安全感等一切负面心理。可五千年文明所作的努力，始终在改善外在环境，创造物质条件。除了使

需求越来越大之外，并没有从根本上解决问题。就像身体有了病灶之后，我们只是在伤口涂抹镇痛药，点缀装饰品，除了得到片刻安宁和麻痹自己以外，能根除病情吗？

佛法之所以能解除痛苦，是因为佛陀找到了病灶所在。那就是我们内心的迷惑和烦恼，这是人类痛苦的根源，也是世界一切灾难的根源。如果不能找到真正的痛苦之因，从根上解决，其他努力只能起到暂时的缓解作用。比如我们孤独时找人陪一陪，或是看看电视，但这只是转移注意力，让痛苦不那么直接。事实上，造成孤独的苦因还在。只要不去除这个因，再多的缓解都是无济于事的，而且效果会越来越差。就像抗生素导致的耐药菌一样，同样的缓解方式，效果很快就会递减。然后就要更大的剂量，更新的方式。只要那些不良心理存在，它们就随时准备制造事端，制造痛苦，制造轮回。

当年，释迦牟尼佛正是在菩提树下，通过对十二缘起的观察和追溯，才找到真正的苦因，找到众生流转生死的源头。同时也发现，每个生命还具备觉悟的潜质，可以从根本上解决迷惑和烦恼。证悟后，佛陀说法四十五年，向众生宣说了解决痛苦的方法，那就是闻思修，是戒定慧，是八正道，是四谛法门，是一切众生皆能成佛的大乘菩萨道。这就是缘起的智慧。这个发现使生命得到拯救，

看到希望。

不论世间还是出世间的成就，都要在看清缘起的前提下，顺势而为，精进努力。所以，随缘和进取是不矛盾的。我们学习佛法，就是要学习并运用缘起的智慧。这样才能跳出主观的错误认识，放下我执，从更高的角度认识一切。在生活中，可以更善巧地处理工作、家庭等各种事务。逆缘出现时，安然接纳，知道一切都有前因；顺缘出现时，及时把握，知道机会都是给有准备的人。在修行上，学会用缘起的智慧认识生命，观察世界。真正认识缘起，就能了知空性，了知诸法实相。这就是生命的觉醒和解脱。

九、结束语

当我们的观念改变
知道选择什么，舍弃什么
知道怎么看世界，看人生
心态必然随之改变
而心态的积累会成为性格
性格的积累会成为生命品质

本次讲座从八个方面，解读了“佛教徒的人生态度”。一方面，希望消除世人对佛教的误解；一方面，希望人们通过对佛教的正确认识，从中受益。佛法是人生的大智慧。这种智慧不是玄谈，而是佛陀亲证的，是一代代祖师大德用生命践行的。在今天，这一古老智慧已经传到全世界，使越来越多的人因为听闻佛法改变了人生观。当我们的观念改变，知道选择什么，舍弃什么，知道怎么看世界，看人生，心态必然随之改变。而心态的积累会成为性格，性格的积累会成为生命品质。希望大家能以“佛教徒的人生态度”，对照自己的三观，并在生活中践行，将会终生受用不尽。





THE LIFE ATTITUDES OF BUDDHISTS

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Living in this world, we have our own views on life, the world, and values. Because of these different views and life experiences, our attitudes toward life vary greatly. As Buddhists, how should we practice and live? Should we be passive or proactive? Optimistic or pessimistic? Cherish life or face death? Benefit ourselves or benefit others? To love or not to love? These questions are not only widely misunderstood by society but also remain unclear to many Buddhist practitioners. If we lack clear understanding, it not only hinders our own cultivation, but also makes it difficult to share the essence of Buddhism and embody the true spirit of a Buddhist practitioner. In light of this, this lecture will explore eight key aspects to interpret “The Life Attitudes of Buddhists.”

I

PASSIVE OR PROACTIVE

In China, people generally perceive Buddhists as passive and pessimistic. They believe that Buddhism is merely a source of comfort in old age or a means of healing after setbacks in career or relationships. Due to these misconceptions, many people keep distance from Buddhism, fearing that embracing the faith would strip away life's pleasures or make them seem different from others. But are Buddhists truly passive? If not, in what ways are they proactive? To answer this question, we must first ask what it means to be passive and proactive.

1. The Definitions and Origins of Passivity and Proactivity

Passivity and proactivity reflect our emotions, behaviors,

and attitudes toward life. To understand this better, let us first look at how they are expressed and the background from which they arise.

1) Expressions of Passivity and Proactivity

Passivity refers to a lack of interest that leads to a lack of effort, inaction, or unwillingness to strive, and sometimes even deliberate avoidance or resistance. Its opposite is proactivity. When it comes to one's attitude toward life, passivity is often linked with a sense of world-weariness. In Chinese, this is described as being "passive and weary of the world," a phrase that carries an entirely negative meaning.

In fact, passivity and proactivity are neutral in themselves. Only when applied to specific situations can they be judged as right or wrong. When we fail to make an effort in meaningful pursuits, such passivity is negative and needs to change. Likewise, when we are obsessed with trivial or even harmful things, such proactivity is also negative. Simply put, we should do what should be done and refrain from what should not. I think we can all agree on this.

The key difference lies in how we define what should be

done and what is truly positive and meaningful. And this depends on our values. Different values lead to very different judgements about what counts as passivity and proactivity. In traditional Chinese culture, Confucianism takes an active part in worldly affairs: it encourages people to cultivate personal virtue, foster harmony within the family, govern society with integrity, and strive for peace throughout the world. However, Daoism upholds the principle of “non-action,” favoring a natural and effortless way of governance. From the perspective of social development, being proactive seems positive. Yet, is the relentless pursuit of progress always the right approach?

Ever since China’s reform and opening-up, the entire society has been seeking economic development, eager to convert all available resources into wealth as quickly as possible. After decades of poverty, this proactive drive has indeed improved people’s living standards, yielding certain positive effects. Yet as ecological degradation worsens and moral boundaries are continually breached, people, living amid both environmental and spiritual pollution, have begun to see the side effects of blind proactivity. The

spread of counterfeit and substandard products, along with many forms of social disorder—are these not all the results of such relentless “positive” pursuit?

If we act proactively without distinguishing right from wrong, our actions are improper. But if we know something is wrong and still do it deliberately, that kind of proactiveness becomes intentional wrongdoing and must be stopped. Therefore, the key is not whether we act, but what we do and how we do it.

2) The Background of Passivity and Proactivity

Why are we proactive about some things, yet passive or even resistant toward others? The answer lies first in our own perception. What we consider important, valuable, or interesting naturally draws our attention and effort.

Looking back, isn't it true that everything we have actively pursued shares these traits? As the saying goes, “Interest is the best teacher,” for it sparks initiative and draws us into wholehearted engagement. Such motivation arises from both innate factors accumulated from past lives and from cultivation shaped by our perception in this life. When

elevated to a sense of responsibility and mission, this proactive attitude can remain steadfast.

A classic example is Confucius: he spent his lifetime seeking to restore the Zhou rites and promote his philosophical and political ideals, traveling among the feudal states to persuade their rulers. Along the way, he encountered many setbacks, including the scorn of hermits. However, he never gave up—persisting even when he knew success was unlikely. In contrast to Confucius’s proactive engagement with the world, many reclusive scholars in history found refuge in nature and led a life of detachment and non-action. According to the *Zhuangzi*, when Emperor Yao intended to cede the throne to Xu You, Xu You not only refused but also went to the river to wash his ears, feeling that such words had tainted him. This was the very opportunity Confucius dreamed of—power within reach, a chance to realize his grand vision. Clearly, people have different aspirations. Xu You longed for a carefree and unfettered life, viewing fame and fortune as both meaningless and best to be avoided.

In addition to values, passivity and proactivity are also influenced by life experiences. Some people encounter

obstacles at every turn during their growth. They struggle in their careers and unhappy marriages, enduring various setbacks that make them feel hopeless. Over time, they come to see the world through a negative lens—focusing on potential obstacles, exaggerating their impact, and avoiding new attempts out of fear of failure. Others, by contrast, have enjoyed a smoother path in life and therefore tend to view things more positively, with greater confidence in striving for what they want. Of course, attitudes shaped by experience are not always stable, for circumstances change. When adversity and failure recur, even those who were once positive may lose heart and become pessimistic.

Additionally, passivity and proactivity are also influenced by external circumstances. This is why the ancients said, “When in adversity, cultivate oneself; when in prosperity, benefit the world.” When we are frustrated, it is best to turn inward to cultivate character and improve ourselves; When we attain success and high position, we should step forward to assist virtuous rulers and work for the benefits of all.

Life is short and our energy is limited; we cannot have everything, so we are constantly making choices. Every

choice entails trade-offs: in gaining one thing, we must give up another. The purpose of choosing is to make the best use of our limited time and energy. We should be proactive in what we choose to pursue while adopting a passive attitude toward unrelated matters that could become distractions. The ancients said that “Indulgence in trivial pleasures can destroy one’s resolve.” Why is this so? Because we fail to distinguish between what is primary and what is secondary. As a result, we spend too much time on matters that should be taken lightly, to the point that it interferes with our normal study and work.

In conclusion, passivity and proactivity are relative. At different stages of life, and when facing different matters, we make our own choices. What we choose is influenced by our perception, experiences, and the environment around us. These choices shape the course of our lives and give meaning to our lives. We all have things we’re passionate about, but some pursuits can lead to obsession, moral decline, or even harm to society—this is how we actively create negative karma. However, other pursuits help us improve our mental states, elevate the quality of our lives, and benefit both

ourselves and others—this is how we actively cultivate positive karma.

2. Is Buddhism Passive

Many people think that Buddhism is passive. This view mainly arises for the following reasons.

The first reason lies in the monastic system. Monastics must renounce secular life and let go of attachments to family, relationships, wealth, and social status. In contrast, traditional Chinese values regard building a family and a career as life's most important undertakings, and continuing the family lineage as a fundamental act of filial piety. Furthermore, bringing honor to one's ancestors through wealth and prestige is seen as an even higher aspiration. From this perspective, letting go of secular life appears passive, while striving for fame and fortune seems proactive.

The second reason lies in the Buddhist way of life. Most people are caught up in eating, drinking and other worldly pleasures. Especially today, the modern world constantly fuels desires and promotes consumption, keeping people

absorbed in both real and virtual pleasures. In contrast, monastics live simply—they are vegetarian, celibate, and content with few desires. Many find this difficult to understand, for they see Buddhist practitioners as indifferent to life and out of step with modern times, and view their way of living as a form of self-imposed suffering.

The third reason comes from the Buddhist attitudes toward life. Most people have a strong sense of self-attachment, and see themselves as the center of everything, which easily leads to conflict with others. Influenced by Darwinian ideas such as “natural selection” and “survival of the fittest,” people continually strive to possess more, compare and compete with others. This inevitably gives rise to conflicts between individuals, groups, ethnicities, and even nations. In contrast, monastics lead a peaceful life, free from contention, and follow the path of forbearance. To ordinary people, such an attitude may appear passive.

Therefore, it may seem reasonable to label Buddhism as “negative.” But the problem lies in the standard of judgment—when the standard is wrong, the conclusion is bound to be wrong.

Although monastics give up the pursuit of fame, wealth, and social status, they seek a higher spiritual fulfillment. While they let go of material pleasures, they strive for the ultimate joy of liberation. Though they practice forbearance, it is neither about suppressing anger nor a sign of weakness. Rather, it arises from great inner strength—the ability to calmly accept all that life brings. Without creating opposition, they resolve problems with wisdom.

Therefore, passivity and proactivity cannot be judged in a fixed way. If we look at an issue only from one aspect, our understanding will inevitably be one-sided. Only when we observe from different aspects and think deeply can we make the right choice. Buddhism, from the insight of wisdom, guides the way for us.

3. Set Clear Goals and Strive Forward

So, are Buddhists really passive or proactive? It depends on how we look at them. In worldly life, Buddhists may appear passive, but regarding life's pursuit, they are proactive.

1) Buddhists Have Clear Life Goals

All Buddhist practitioners are familiar with the Four Great Vows:

Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to liberate them all.

Afflictions are endless; I vow to eradicate them all.

Dharma teachings are immeasurable; I vow to learn them all.

The path to Buddhahood is supreme; I vow to attain it.

Each vow is expressed with words such as “numberless,” “endless,” “immeasurable,” and “supreme,” reflecting the vast aspirations of buddhas and bodhisattvas. These vows show the life goal every Buddhist should follow. In contrast, ordinary people often set their goals for themselves or for their families. Yet studying Buddhism means learning from the buddhas—not only seeking personal liberation but also striving to liberate all beings from suffering and attain lasting happiness.

Throughout Buddhist history, countless great masters have devoted themselves to spreading the true Dharma, even at the risk of their lives. It is through their tireless efforts that Buddhism was transmitted from India to China and

eventually to the rest of the world, allowing generation after generation to benefit from studying and practicing its teachings.

During the Tang Dynasty, the eminent monk Jianzhen (known in Japan as Ganjin) made six attempts to voyage to Japan to transmit the Dharma. His journey spanned ten years, marked by unimaginable hardships. Along the way, many of his disciples succumbed to storms and illness, and he himself lost his sight due to the arduous journey. Yet, he remained unwavering in his resolve. Finally, at the age of 66, he set foot on the foreign land and became the founding patriarch of the Vinaya School in Japan.

What sustained him through those voyages across the vast, unpredictable sea? As he himself said, “Spreading the Dharma is of utmost importance—what is there to fear in the boundless sea?” From the moment he resolved to embark on this mission, he had set life and death aside, and thus no obstacle could deter him. What fueled his perseverance was precisely his unwavering devotion to spreading the Dharma and liberating all sentient beings.

2) Buddhists Must Study the Teachings and Seek the Truth

Studying Buddhism is a journey in pursuit of truth. Only by actively studying the teachings can we establish the right views, practice according to the Dharma, and explore the true meaning of life. When we open the *Memoirs of Eminent Monks*, we find that every great master of the past has set an inspiring example for us to follow. This is before we even mention the Buddha's extraordinary sacrifices in his past lives, such as offering his own body in exchange for a single verse of the Dharma, or the bodhisattvas' aspirations and actions—using their skin as paper, their bones as pens, and their blood as ink.

Master Xuanzang, after extensively seeking wisdom from virtuous teachers across China, realized that the Buddhist sutras available in China were far from complete. He resolutely embarked on a journey westward in search of the Dharma from India. Traveling to India in that era was an immense challenge—so perilous that “of a hundred who set out, fewer than ten would return.” Crossing desolate deserts and perilous snow-capped mountains, he narrowly escaped death countless times before finally reaching the sacred land.

There, he studied for many years at Nalanda, the preeminent Buddhist academy of the time. Master Xuanzang's vast knowledge, extraordinary memory, and sharp reasoning earned the admiration of many Buddhist schools in India, making his renown unmatched in his era. Yet, his pursuit of the Dharma was never for personal reputation—it was to bring this wisdom back to China. Overcoming tremendous hardships once more, he returned to China and launched the most extensive translation project in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Master Xuanzang dedicated his entire life to the profound study of Buddhist teachings, took the pursuit of truth as his mission, and truly embodied the Mahayana spirit of selfless service to all beings.

As Buddhist disciples, we too should follow the example of the wise and take up the mission of cultivating the mind within and spreading the Dharma without. This is because Buddhist wisdom holds universal value—it is something that all sentient beings need. Confusion is not ours alone, nor is awakening our exclusive goal. The effort to overcome afflictions is a shared journey for all beings. In reality, all sentient beings are troubled by confusion and afflictions, though

many are either too preoccupied to address them or have yet to realize their presence. Throughout history, philosophers from both East and West have sought to uncover the true meaning of life. Who am I? Where do we come from, and where do we go after death? What is the purpose of living? Without the wisdom attained by the Buddha through enlightenment, mere speculation alone cannot provide us with answers to these ultimate questions.

Therefore, we must actively study the teachings and seek the truth, for the benefit of ourselves and all sentient beings. Although learning the Dharma has become more accessible today, to pursue the truth, we must dedicate our lives to its practice with unwavering perseverance.

3) Buddhists Must Distinguish Right from Wrong and Choose Good over Evil

As both good and evil exist in the human world, there has long been debate over whether human nature is inherently good or inherently evil. Which view is correct? From the Buddhist perspective, human nature is neither inherently good nor evil. Rather, it is a coexistence and struggle between these

two forces. Practicing Buddhism means refraining from evil and cultivating virtue, as expressed in the verse: “Do no evil, practice all good, purify the mind—this is the teaching of all buddhas.” This verse comes from the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and was a teaching imparted by the Seven Buddhas of the past to their disciples. Back then, when Bai Juyi asked Master Niaochao about the Dharma, the Master also responded with this verse, which shows its importance. The Dharma is vast and profound, yet when embodied in practice, it centers on eliminating unwholesome states of mind and nurturing compassion and wisdom.

The Sravaka Vehicle focuses on the principle of “Do no evil.” Such practice itself is also a way of cultivating virtue. If no one kills, we will not suffer harm. If no one steals, we will be free from exploitation. If no one engages in sexual misconduct, countless conflicts in the world will be avoided. If no one lies, we don’t need to fear deception. If no one consumes intoxicants, keeping the mind clear, many tragedies never arise. Beyond this, one must further eliminate greed, anger, ignorance, and the self-attachment born of delusion, eradicating negative mental states at their root.

Meanwhile, the Bodhisattva Path places greater emphasis on “practicing all good.” It is not only about observing precepts to benefit others, but also about actively doing good deeds. Thus, in the Bodhisattva precepts, beyond the precepts of moral discipline, there are also the precepts of cultivating virtuous deeds and the precepts of benefiting sentient beings.

Good deeds, no matter how great or small, should be done whenever possible—according to one’s ability, strength, and circumstances. This spirit exemplified by Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, who “responds to every prayer and serves as a guiding vessel in the sea of suffering.” Whenever beings are in difficulty, the Bodhisattva relieves their suffering and regards every sentient being as his very own. Wherever beings are in need, the Bodhisattva responds without distinction of closeness or distance, and seeks no return. This embodies the unconditional loving-kindness and compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Whether it is refraining from evil or practicing good deeds, both require a proactive mindset and consistent action. This is not a momentary impulse, but a lifelong effort that extends endlessly into the future.

4) Buddhists Must Cultivate Their Character and Benefit Others

If we aspire to help and guide others like the buddhas and bodhisattvas, we must first actively cultivate and refine our own character, starting with overcoming our afflictions. Sentient beings continue to cycle through birth and death because of the ignorance within their minds, while external circumstances merely serve as supporting conditions. If we were free from greed, we would not be swayed by fame and fortune or become enslaved by our desires. If we were free from anger, we would not be disturbed by adversity or suffer the pain of a second arrow—the emotional distress that follows physical pain. If we were free from ignorance, we would not lose sight of life’s true direction, blindly following fleeting feelings.

Practicing Buddhism is a profound transformation of our life—a process of reshaping our deluded personality into the perfected qualities of the Buddha, embodying three virtues of eliminating afflictions, wisdom, and compassion.

The virtue of eliminating afflictions refers to freeing oneself

from the afflictions and defilements that have persisted since beginningless time, thereby perfecting the character. This serves as the very foundation for helping and guiding others, for buddhas and bodhisattvas not only teach all beings through words but also embody the Dharma through their actions and virtues.

The virtue of wisdom and the virtue of compassion are the complete realization of wisdom and compassion. For example, when bodhisattvas practice generosity, they not only realize the emptiness of the giver, the receiver, and the act of giving (threefold emptiness), but also cultivate the ability to relinquish what is hardest to give. This principle applies not only to generosity but to all of the Six Paramitas and the countless Bodhisattva practices. To benefit all beings, a bodhisattva is willing to sacrifice everything without hesitation. Thus, walking the Bodhisattva Path means total dedication—a boundless commitment that extends into the infinite future, tirelessly liberating all beings without ever growing weary.

Regardless of the practice we follow, it is essential to overcome the habits that have been ingrained since beginningless time. It is like a warrior facing an army of ten thousand—we

must press forward with fearless resolve. In Buddhism, there is a concept known as “armor-like diligence,” akin to a warrior donning armor and charging fearlessly into battle. However, in spiritual practice, the true enemies do not come from outside but arise from within. Only by conquering the inner Mara can we break free from delusion. Thus, the greatest enemy in life is not others, but ourselves.

In conclusion, Buddhists should take the buddhas and bodhisattvas as their role models, set clear life goals, actively pursue truth, and spread the Dharma. From this perspective, the Buddhist attitude toward life is undoubtedly positive. Many people regard Buddhism as passive simply because they judge it by their own feelings. They do not truly understand the aspirations of Buddhist practitioners or realize the profound value that Buddhism offers to both life and society.

II

PESSIMISM OR OPTIMISM

When discussing passivity and proactivity, we cannot avoid another related topic: pessimism and optimism. These pairs share a similarity—passivity and pessimism often give rise to each other, just as proactivity and optimism do. The difference lies in their focus: passivity and proactivity are mainly expressed in our attitude and manner of conduct, while pessimism and optimism reflect our views on life and the world—underlying tone that colors our lives.

1. The Definitions and Origins of Pessimism and Optimism

1) Manifestations of Pessimism and Optimism

A common metaphor for pessimism and optimism is the half-filled glass of water. The pessimist sees it as “half empty” and feels disheartened, while the optimist sees it as “half full” and feels content. Facing the same half-filled glass of water, different mindsets bring entirely opposite feelings. From this perspective, pessimism may seem undesirable. However, throughout history, many philosophers have examined life from a deeper level and ultimately reached pessimistic conclusions.

Arthur Schopenhauer is a prime example. He believed that “Life is filled with all forms of desire: when desire is unfulfilled, we suffer; when it is satisfied, we grow bored. Life thus swings like a pendulum between suffering and boredom.” This vividly reflects the lives of most people. Desire is innate to life itself. When it is not fulfilled, we chase after it with endless effort because we feel empty and restless. Yet once a desire is met, weariness soon follows, and we begin to pursue new ones. In this endless cycle, life gradually wears itself out, leaving us with nothing more than fleeting moments of satisfaction and little sense of meaning. Therefore, Schopenhauer also compared human life to a clock that has been wound

up and moves blindly on, unaware of why it ticks. In his view, everything is driven by the blind will to live, which makes the pursuit of ultimate purpose or value meaningless.

Apart from the pessimism that arises from philosophical reflection, ordinary people may also develop a pessimistic mindset shaped by factors such as personality, education, and experiences. This kind of pessimism is often closely linked to passivity. Compared with philosophical pessimism, this kind is less deep and therefore easier to change.

Optimism also has both surface and deep levels. When optimism comes mainly from favorable circumstances, it tends to be fragile. It is a surface-level optimism—one without real roots, similar to what people sometimes call “foolish happiness.” Such optimism depends on favorable external conditions, but once hardships arise, it becomes difficult to maintain. In fact, lacking resilience, it may quickly turn into pessimism. This is something we should be careful about.

True optimism lies in understanding that everything has both positive and negative aspects. So we choose to see things from the positive side. This is optimism based on

wisdom. With this mindset, no matter what we encounter, we can still find the positive side rather than being swayed by external circumstances.

2) The Background of Pessimism and Optimism

It is clear that both pessimism and optimism have surface and deep levels.

Deep pessimism comes from reflecting on and searching for the meaning of life. When we cannot find the value of life or understanding the purpose of living, we tend to see more of life's helplessness, insignificance, and suffering. This kind of pessimism cannot be changed by external factors such as fame, wealth, or pleasure. This is why many intellectuals—philosophers, writers, and artists—remain in suffering even after achieving success, and some even end their own lives. They see how absurd and illusory life is, but cannot find a way out. After all, death is inevitable. If we believe that nothing remains after death, then, in a certain sense, life has no value.

Just as a Western saying goes, “If we have only one life to live, we might as well not have lived at all.” Even if you could

live for ten thousand years, what difference would it make? It will all pass in the blink of an eye. Dinosaurs once dominated the Earth for 150 million years, yet they went extinct 60 million years ago, leaving only fossils to show they ever existed. Similarly, no matter how much wealth or success we achieve, no matter how high our status or how great our fame, if we only live once, then after a few decades, everything will vanish with death. In the vast history spanning hundreds of millions or even billions of years, even the most glorious life is as small as a speck of dust. What value does such a life truly hold?

To live well, we must find the meaning of life—for it is what gives us a reason to live. Of course, some people rarely reflect on the meaning of life. They feel content as long as they live as others do: to start a family, have children, and build a career. Their greatest hopes are nothing more than to live comfortably, see their children succeed, and enjoy a smooth career. They may not even feel that life should have any deeper meaning: “Isn’t this how everyone lives? What more is there to seek?” However, for those who think deeply, it is easy to see through the fleeting and illusory nature of these

external pursuits. Only by discovering life's true meaning can they find peace of mind. Yet, without great wisdom, it is very hard to answer these ultimate questions. When one searches far and wide yet finds no answers, or exhausts both body and mind in vain, a deep pessimism naturally arises.

Buddhism teaches that life is suffering, and this is often mistaken for pessimism. Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy, for example, is believed to have been influenced by Buddhist thought. However, this understanding is incomplete. In fact, suffering is merely a skillful means of expression, meant for ordinary beings, for their lives are governed by ignorance, delusion and karma. As the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* says, "Every thought that arises in ignorance gives rise to wrongdoing and karma." Yet Buddhism also tells us that life has another dimension. If we can transcend ignorance and eradicate afflictions, we can return to our inherent state of awakened nature.

These two views are not in conflict. Life has both deluded and awakened aspects, much like clouds and the vast sky. When the sky is covered with clouds, it may seem that the clouds are everything. Yet the sky itself remains clear and

vast—only when the clouds disperse do we see its true nature. In delusion, life's nature is suffering, which gives rise to pessimism. In awakening, its true nature is pure and complete, leaving no room for pessimism.

2. Is Buddhism Pessimistic

Many people think of Buddhism as pessimistic—a misunderstanding that mainly comes from its monastic traditions and certain teachings.

In ancient times, becoming a monastic was called “entering the gate of emptiness.” The phrase carries a sense of helplessness—as if one had reached a dead end and grown weary of the secular world—or a sense of solitude, a life spent in stillness among dim lanterns and ancient buddhas. This image is often portrayed in literature and film. As a result, many people view renunciation as an act of escape or a pessimistic response to life's setbacks.

In fact, this is a complete misunderstanding. Although such cases do exist among monastics, they are neither the norm nor the true purpose of ordination. The Buddha himself was

once a prince, yet he gave up his royal luxuries to embrace a monastic life, free of material possessions. He made this choice to pursue higher spiritual goals. This is because he had witnessed the suffering of aging, illness, and death; the fleeting and illusory nature of worldly life; and the delusion and afflictions that trouble all beings. Without addressing these issues, we cannot find the true meaning of life. For ordinary people, life often flows along with the current of the world, while monastics have the courage to go against it. Their choice is not an act of pessimism or escape.

The teachings that many people misunderstand are those on suffering, emptiness, and impermanence taught in the Sravaka Vehicle. Many people long for love, career success, fame, and fortune, tirelessly pursuing sensual pleasures. For example, the pleasures in the Three Realms, or the five sensual pleasures of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Yet the Buddha teaches us that a life built upon delusion is inherently tainted by afflictions, and any worldly happiness is only a brief relief from suffering, fleeting and impermanent.

Nirvana is another concept often misunderstood, as many mistake it for death. In fact, nirvana means the cessation of

inner delusion and afflictions. The Buddha teaches us that the root of all suffering lies in our wrong views, delusion, afflictions, and the karma they create. Only by transforming our views and eliminating these afflictions can we free ourselves from the endless cycle of rebirth.

Therefore, this kind of Sravaka teaching is not pessimism; it is a way of facing reality and finding a true solution. Just as illness can only be cured by recognizing the disease and treating its cause, we must first understand suffering and its causes, and then address them at their root to restore well-being.

Whether in its monastic system or its teachings, Buddhism is not pessimistic. What people call “pessimism” is merely a misunderstanding rooted in a worldly point of view. As the saying goes, “Renunciation is the undertaking of a true hero, something even generals and ministers cannot accomplish.” This is because renouncing worldly pleasures requires great courage. And seeking the truth calls for even greater courage—the strength to endure what is hard to endure, to accomplish what seems impossible, and to stand firm even when facing ten thousand opponents.

If the Sravaka teaching represents a wise understanding of the world as it truly is, then the Bodhisattva Path embodies an infinite vow of compassion for all beings. For Mahayana practitioners, we realize the afflictions within our own lives. This naturally leads us to see that others suffer in the same way. We cannot bear to see them trapped in the ocean of suffering, unaware of their own suffering. Thus, we must generate bodhicitta and take benefiting all beings as our mission. This is not a fleeting impulse but a lifelong commitment that extends endlessly into the future.

With such great compassion, great loving-kindness, great vows, and great actions, how could there be even a trace of pessimism? Thus, during the great debate on the value of life in China's Republican era, Liang Qichao proposed Buddhism as a guiding principle for moral development. He believed that the Bodhisattva's spirit of saving the world was "a timely remedy for the needs of this era," one that seeks the well-being of all rather than the well-being of oneself alone.

3. Free from Sorrow and Joy, Seeing Things as They Truly Are

Although Buddhism is not pessimistic, we should not assume that it is optimistic. In fact, both pessimism and optimism are partial views of life. Buddhism helps us cultivate the wisdom of seeing things as they truly are, which allows our views to align with the truth of the world—that is, the Middle Way.

1) Buddhism Is Not Pessimistic

Why is Buddhism not pessimistic?

First, although Buddhism regards life as illusory and teaches us that “all conditioned phenomena are like dreams, illusions, bubbles or shadows,” it does not deny the existence of phenomena. By viewing the world through the lens of dependent origination, Buddhism reveals that everything is a manifestation of cause and effect, a false appearance arising from conditions. There is no entity that exists independently, remains unchanged, or possesses the power of control. Therefore, nothing is permanent, nor does it end in complete extinction. Life, in fact, is like a river, flowing from the infinite

past into the endless future. Understanding the cycle of rebirth gives life its length, while understanding the nature of the mind gives life its depth. Buddhist wisdom can help us not only recognize life's length and depth, but also realize the emptiness of all phenomena as they arise. It is not a pessimistic view of life; it is a way of seeing things as they truly are.

Second, although Buddhism recognizes that life is filled with delusion, it also tells us that all sentient beings have the capacity for self-liberation. Delusion, in this sense, refers to the uncertainty about life's ultimate questions. Unable to find answers, we become trapped in our own perceptions, giving rise to afflictions and unwholesome karma, unable to free ourselves. What is the way out? Only by studying Buddhism can we understand that behind our delusion and afflictions lies the potential for enlightenment. When Shakyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, he realized, "I have found the path of the ancient sages—the very path by which all the buddhas of the past attained enlightenment." Later, he taught for forty-five years, revealing countless methods to guide sentient beings toward awakening. Thus, Buddhism points out the reality of ordinary

beings not to make us despair, but to awaken us and help us see where hope lies.

Third, Buddhism teaches bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva Path, giving life profound meaning and opening a bright way forward, even within the cycle of samsara. On this path, the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and great masters stand as shining examples. Yet many philosophers have failed to find a way out, for they rely solely on rationality, which is rather limited. Buddhism, however, emphasizes not only rationality and right view, but also the meditative practices of samatha and vipassana. More importantly, through cultivating bodhicitta and benefiting others, we can break free from self-clinging and nurture compassion, realizing the harmonious perfection of both compassion and wisdom. Following the path illuminated by the Buddha, guided by the footsteps of accomplished practitioners before us—how could we possibly remain pessimistic?

If we truly understand Buddhism, especially the spirit of the Bodhisattva Path, we will know that Buddhism is not pessimistic at all.

2) Buddhism Is Not Optimistic

Why is Buddhism not optimistic either?

First of all, a life rooted in delusion and affliction is by nature full of suffering. Many Buddhist sutras clearly describe suffering, including the three kinds of suffering, the eight sufferings, and countless other forms of suffering. The boundless universe is essentially a place where suffering accumulates. However, due to ignorance, we often only see the surface of things and rarely touch the underlying truths. We think that getting married and starting a family is happiness, not realizing that this is the beginning of new bonds. We believe that having children is a source of joy, unaware that it is also the beginning of emotional entanglements. We see career success as fulfillment, not knowing that it brings us pressure. Facing such realities, we find it hard to remain optimistic.

Second, we must face the impermanence of life. Life is fragile, and death is inevitable, though the timing of death is unpredictable. Where will we go after death? In this life, we have the rare opportunity to be born as human beings

and to hear the Dharma. If our breath stops suddenly, are we certain where we will go in the next life? If we cannot be the master of ourselves now, then when death comes, we will have even less power to choose our path—only to be carried along by the force of our karma. Therefore, we can not be optimistic before attaining enlightenment.

Third, we must realize the danger of the Three Lower Realms—those of hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. From beginningless time, we have created countless unwholesome actions. Once these actions bear fruit, we will inevitably fall into the Three Lower Realms and suffer there for long eons. As long as afflictions and karma remain, we will endlessly cycle through the Six Realms. Even if we are fortunate enough to be born as humans, we cannot guarantee that we will encounter wise teachers or hear the Buddha Dharma. Thus, we cannot be optimistic about where our lives will lead.

Fourth, even if we attain realization and gain mastery over life and death, as Mahayana practitioners, we still carry the mission of liberating others. When we see sentient beings deeply trapped in suffering, we cannot bear to see them suffer,

and we vow to liberate them. However, sentient beings are difficult to guide, and aspiration alone is not enough to help them. When we see how difficult the Bodhisattva Path is, and how unyielding sentient beings remain, it is hard for us to remain optimistic.

Fifth, we must face the chaos of the Dharma-ending Age. Today, natural disasters and human calamities are countless. Driven by greed, our planet has been left scarred and desolate—its air, water, forests, grasslands, mountains, and even the polar regions polluted and damaged, some beyond repair. In this Defiled World of the Five Turbidities, everywhere we turn we see the danger of self-destruction. Facing such harsh realities, we find it difficult to remain optimistic.

In summary, though the future of life is bright, the reality before us makes it difficult to stay optimistic.

3) A Middle Way Attitude Toward Life

Buddhist practice emphasizes the Middle Way. In daily life, this is expressed as a balanced attitude—neither pessimistic nor optimistic. This is because both pessimism and optimism arise from a one-sided view of reality: pessimism can

easily lead to despair, while optimism can lead to recklessness. In countless teachings, the Buddha reminded us to see ourselves and the world as they truly are. This means that we need to see the shortcomings of life, giving rise to the aspiration to be free from suffering and attain happiness. At the same time, we should realize that life itself holds the potential for self-liberation, thereby developing firm confidence in the bright future that our practice can bring.

How can we cultivate a Middle-Way attitude in life? Firstly, we must establish the right view, the first of the Noble Eightfold Path. This means we should avoid eternalism and nihilism, as the teaching says: “Neither arising nor ceasing, neither permanent nor annihilated, neither identical nor different, neither coming nor going.” With right view, in daily life, we neither indulge in desires nor bring unnecessary suffering upon ourselves. In practice, we work diligently without becoming overly rigid. It is like tuning the strings of a musical instrument—only when the strings are neither too loose nor too tight can they produce harmonious music.

It is the same with understanding the teachings. We should grasp the literal meaning of the texts while also uncovering

the deeper insights they convey. Only in this way can we understand not only what the Buddha taught, but also why he taught it—thereby avoiding partial interpretations or misreading his teachings. For example, when the Buddha said, “Life is suffering,” he did not mean that we should avoid or passively endure suffering, nor was he encouraging pessimism or world-weariness. Instead, he was guiding us to see reality as it is, so that we are not deceived by the illusion of fleeting pleasures. By finding the root causes of suffering, we can address them at their source and attain true happiness. Only by facing the reality of life can we apply the wisdom of the Dharma to actively transform ourselves and bring benefit to all beings.

III

ABSTINENCE OR INDULGENCE

Monastics are known for their celibacy, vegetarian living, simple robes, and freedom from material possessions. In the early Buddhist Sangha, renunciants lived very simply, possessing only three robes and a bowl, sustaining themselves through alms. Chan poetry also reflects this way of life, emphasizing a state of detachment and contentment:

“With a single alms bowl, one eats from a thousand homes;
with a solitary body, one wanders ten thousand miles.”

“A pond of lotus leaves provides endless robes; a few pine blossoms offer ample food.”

“Atop a thousand peaks stands a single hut; half is home to

an old monk, the other half to the clouds.”

These verses illustrate different aspects of a life free from desires and attachments. Because of this, many perceive Buddhism as ascetic. Young people, in particular, may hesitate to learn about Buddhism, fearing questions like: “Can I still get married? Can I still live a normal life?” To them, practicing Buddhism seems to mean cutting them off from the world and relinquishing all desires.

In reality, this is a long-standing misunderstanding. Desire has many dimensions and is not limited to material aspects alone. Moreover, Buddhism has different precepts for monastics and lay practitioners, meaning that learning Buddhism does not equate to absolute renunciation of desire, as many assume. So, how does Buddhism truly view desire?

1. What Is Desire

Desire refers to needs, which can be physical or mental, instinctive or socially influenced. In Buddhism, the world is divided into three realms: the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm, collectively known as the

Three Realms. We exist in the Desire Realm, where all beings are governed by desires, tirelessly striving to satisfy them—even at the cost of their lives. As the saying goes, “Humans risk their lives for riches, just as birds risk theirs for food.”

1) Basic Human Desires

In the human realm, desire manifests in five main forms: wealth, sexual pleasure, fame, food, and sleep. Wealth is the craving for material possessions; sexual pleasure embraces emotional and sexual desire; fame reflects the pursuit of recognition; food meets the need for nourishment; and sleep fulfills the body’s need for rest. The average person sleeps about eight hours a day—roughly one-third of life.

Among the five desires, the most prominent are the desires for food and sexual pleasure, as the saying goes: “Food and sex are among humanity’s greatest desires.” They form the foundation for human survival and reproduction. The sutra states, “All sentient beings rely on food to sustain life.” Although “food” usually refers to what we eat and drink, in this context it includes four kinds of sustenance: edible food, the daily meals that nourish the physical body; contact as food,

the external environment that shapes the quality of life; volitional intention as food, the will to survive that drives life forward; and consciousness as food, the *alaya-vijnana* that sustains the continuity of existence.

Everyone has certain desires they give more weight to. The greedy may stop at nothing for wealth; the lustful lose reason in pursuit of beauty; the vain sacrifice everything for fame; the indulgent treat fine food as life's greatest pleasure; and the lazy waste precious time in sleep.

The five desires are rooted in the five sense faculties—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body—which serve as our channels for perceiving the world. These faculties, in turn, are deeply attached to external sensations. For example, the eyes crave pleasing colors and sights. The ears crave melodious and pleasant sounds. The nose craves fragrant scents. The tongue craves delicious flavors. The body craves comfort and pleasurable sensations.

Beyond these physical desires, there are also mental and socially driven ones. These include the growth of basic needs, such as pursuing luxury brands, seeking new experiences,

and striving to keep up with social trends. For example, how large a house does one really need? The standards from a few decades ago are entirely different from those of today. Such changes are largely driven by mental needs and social comparisons rather than practical need.

In addition, there are also purely spiritual pursuits, arising from faith or from fields like literature and the arts. These, too, fall within the realm of desire, which is why we speak of “spiritual nourishment.” Without desire, we would not seek faith with deep inquiry, feel the urge to create, or even take pleasure in appreciating art. If that were the case, how dull and lifeless human history would be.

2) Different Perspectives on Desires

How should we view desire? Should we treat it as a dangerous force that must be strictly forbidden, or as a natural human right to indulge freely? Throughout history, religious teachers and philosophers have held differing perspectives on this matter.

During the Buddha’s time, there were ninety-six non-Buddhist schools in India, most of which advocated asceticism.

They believed that desire was the root of all evil and that only through extreme physical hardship could one remove desires and purify the body and mind. At the beginning of his spiritual quest, the Buddha personally witnessed various ascetic practices in the forest outside Rajagṛha. Some practitioners endured starvation, some submerged themselves in water all day, others stood on one leg for years, and some exposed their bare bodies to the scorching sun. Influenced by these practices, the Buddha himself undertook six years of severe asceticism, “eating only a sesame seed or a single grain of rice per day, until his body became emaciated like a withered tree.” He became so weak that, while bathing in the Neranjara River, he lacked the strength to reach the shore. Through this experience, he realized that extreme asceticism only weakens the body without cultivating wisdom or leading to liberation.

Christianity also holds that desire led to humanity’s downfall. Adam and Eve originally lived carefree in paradise, but after being tempted by the devil to eat the forbidden fruit, they were cast out of the Garden of Eden. As a result, in Christian moral teachings, desire is seen as conflicting

with a devout and pure religious life. To attain spiritual purity, humans must overcome greed and practice strict self-discipline.

Aside from religion, how do philosophers view desire? Antisthenes and Diogenes were key figures of the Cynic school in ancient Greek philosophy. They believed that desire was the root of all suffering and advocated the idea that “Virtue lies in contentment, and freedom from desire is divine.” They not only preached this philosophy but also lived by it. Their only possessions were a staff, a cloak, a begging pouch, and a drinking bowl. One day, Diogenes saw a child scooping water with his hands at a river. Inspired by the simplicity of this act, he immediately discarded his bowl as well.

Early Confucianism did not treat desire as a destructive force. As Xunzi stated, “When hungry, one desires food; when cold, one desires warmth; when weary, one desires rest; people seek benefit and avoid harm—these are human instincts.” This view accepts basic human needs. It was only later that Confucianism began to emphasize the dangers of desire. By the time of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism,

philosophers began to advocate “eliminating human desires to preserve moral principles.” This view held that true morality could only manifest once desires were eradicated.

After the Renaissance, the West broke free from the theocratic constraints of the Middle Ages and began to affirm human desires as natural and reasonable. People saw eating, sleeping, and sexual activity as basic instincts and rightful needs, believing that everyone had every reason to enjoy these inborn desires. This new attitude affirmed and encouraged such desires, greatly fueling the West’s scientific and economic progress. However, it also gave rise to an endless array of social issues.

2. How Does Buddhism View Desires

Buddhism believes that, in terms of their moral quality, desires can be classified into wholesome, unwholesome, and neutral.

1) Desire as a Guarantee for Life’s Continuation

In life, we all have basic needs that sustain our existence and allow human society to continue. When we’re hungry, we

eat; when we're thirsty, we drink; when we're tired, we sleep. For lay Buddhists, this also includes a wholesome and proper family life. These desires are neither good nor bad in themselves—Buddhism calls them “neutral.” As long as we maintain moderation, meeting these needs brings no harm, and there's no need to deliberately make ourselves suffer. Our physical body is like a tool: only by caring for it well can we use it effectively and allow it to serve a greater purpose.

In his early years of practice, the Buddha tried many forms of extreme ascetic practices, such as prolonged fasting and breath control, for six long years. Yet these severe practices neither brought enlightenment nor benefited his health—they only left his body weak and frail. Through this, he realized that blindly torturing the body was futile for spiritual cultivation—like trying to extract oil from sand, it would yield no results. Realizing this, he accepted a bowl of milk porridge offered by a shepherd girl, regained his strength, and then meditated diligently under the Bodhi tree, ultimately attaining enlightenment.

2) The Side Effects of Desires

The Buddha rejected ascetic practices that bore no fruit, but he was even more cautious about indulgence in desire. He constantly reminded his disciples to “have few desires and be content.” For ordinary people, it is far more natural to seek pleasure than to endure hardship. Yet desire is never satisfied; it keeps expanding, revealing itself in the impulses to possess, to compare, and to compete.

For most people today, survival is no longer a concern, yet desire has not diminished—it has only grown stronger. People want more wealth, higher status, and greater fame, with no end in sight. Beyond the urge to possess, we constantly compare ourselves with others. Many spend their whole lives striving to get ahead, without ever asking what it really means to surpass someone else. Such needless comparisons only add to our burden. Comparison then turns into competition. While competition can indeed inspire potential and drive social progress, it also leaves us anxious, tense, and exhausted.

People keep striving to possess more, to compare, and

to compete—all in the hope of living a happy life. Yet for many, even after gaining wealth, success, fame, and pleasure, happiness still feels out of reach. That's because happiness is a fleeting emotion, closely linked to desire: it arises only when a desire is satisfied. In today's world, our desires have multiplied and become harder to fulfill, raising the cost of happiness and leaving us exhausted. Without realizing it, we nurture countless desires, and when these desires turn into attachment, suffering naturally follows.

Today, we enjoy more material abundance than ever before—so much that we constantly have to throw things away. Does this mean we are living a happy life? If each possession were a factor of happiness, our happiness index should be constantly rising. But in reality, the happiness that material things bring is diminishing. In times of poverty, even a single delicious meal could bring lasting contentment. But today, eating too much often leaves us feeling fatigued rather than fulfilled. Studies by Western psychologists show that when people finally get something they have long desired, or achieve a long-awaited promotion and pay raise, the boost in happiness lasts no more than three months. The next feeling

of happiness then depends on getting something better or reaching a higher status. But can we always get more, always go higher?

As desires continue to grow, anxiety, fear, and insecurity arise. The more we acquire, the stronger their fear of losing it becomes. Once what we have gained changes, negative emotions such as hatred, opposition, and conflict emerge, bringing along suffering. The problem is that everything in the world is impermanent. We may cling to wealth, but wealth depreciates; we may hold on to love, but love changes; we may chase after status, but status can be lost; we may depend on connections, but no connection is reliable. As the saying goes, "In this world, there are no eternal friends, only eternal interests." If we do not let go of our greed, suffering will be endless.

Even worse, some people turn to crime in order to satisfy their desires. Most unlawful acts in the world, if traced to their roots, arise from craving, and from the anger when craving is unsatisfied. In satisfying their desires, people bring disaster not only upon themselves but also upon others and society at large. Even wars between nations are often rooted

in the coveting of another country's resources.

Greed not only affects this present life but is also a cause of samsara. In the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, sentient beings suffer from birth, aging, and death; their direct causes are craving, clinging, and becoming (the karmic cause of rebirth). When we become attached to objects of desire, we act upon them, creating karma that binds us to the cycle of samsara. Therefore, we must learn to restrain our desires. If we blindly pursue material possessions, compare ourselves with others, and compete against them, we are merely wasting our lives instead of enjoying them, and certainly not improving their quality.

3) Desire for Wholesome Dharma Perfects Character

As mentioned earlier, desire is a form of need, and by itself, it is neutral. The key lies in what we desire. Psychologist Abraham Maslow identified five levels of human needs: physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization extending to self-transcendence. Thus, desire can also become a noble spiritual pursuit. This is known as wholesome desire, the aspiration to pursue the Dharma. For

example, “I want liberation,” “I want to attain Buddhahood and help all sentient beings achieve liberation”—these are both the goals of our practice and the lasting source of our motivation. So, how can we cultivate the desire for wholesome Dharma? We must embrace a culture of wisdom.

In the Sravaka Path, practice begins with the arising of renunciation—the desire to transcend the Five Desires and Six Sense Objects. Meditation practice consists of the four essential elements: “desire, diligence, mind, and contemplation,” also known as Four Bases of Spiritual Power. Among them, “desire” refers to the aspiration of “I want to practice,” which is a crucial foundation for meditation. Without this intention, we cannot even begin our practice, much less sustain it. In the *Treatise on the Hundred Dharmas*, the Five Situation-specific Mental Factors are “desire, resolve, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom,” with desire coming first, as it is the driving force for liberation. We gather here to hear the Dharma because of a wholesome desire—to study Buddhism, to liberate ourselves from delusion and suffering, and to seek wisdom and truth. All of these are forms of wholesome desire.

In practicing the Bodhisattva Path, we must generate bodhicitta, which includes both aspirational bodhicitta and engaged bodhicitta. Aspirational bodhicitta means establishing a noble altruistic aspiration. Only by setting such a wish in the presence of all the buddhas of the ten directions and all sentient beings, and taking it as our mission throughout all future lives, can we further receive the Bodhisattva precepts and engage in the Bodhisattva practices. Therefore, engaged bodhicitta arises from aspirational bodhicitta, putting that aspiration into practice.

Only by understanding the different kinds of desire can we view them correctly and guide them wisely, so that this desire supports our cultivation, rather than being driven by afflictions.

3. Being Content with Fewer Desires, Benefiting Oneself and Others

The endless chase for material desires not only exhausts us but also fails to bring true happiness. Since happiness ultimately comes from the mind, material possessions merely serve as a supplementary factor. Therefore, Buddhism

opposes indulging in primal, material cravings. However, it does not call for complete asceticism—especially regarding essential needs. Moderation is key. Thus, Buddhism teaches us to cherish our blessings and be content with fewer desires. This approach ensures both our well-being and environmental sustainability, rather than endlessly exploiting nature.

1) Being Content with Fewer Desires Ensures a Happy Life

China has long held the traditional values of cherishing blessings and material goods. However, in recent decades, people's views on consumption have shifted dramatically. Today's trend is to "earn hard and spend freely," to believe that "out with the old, in with the new," and even to embrace spending on credit. This mindset is especially prevalent among young people, who often think: "As long as I have the money, or can borrow it, why not spend it?" Such mentality is a surrender to desires, and its consequences are devastating. In recent years, young adults—including students—have struggled with crippling debt, and some have even been driven to suicide. Such cases have become alarmingly common. Many of these tragedies began with something

seemingly trivial—a purchase beyond one’s means—but ended in the loss of a precious life. The harm caused by unchecked desire is truly heartbreaking.

This raises another question: if we can afford it, should we spend without restraint? In Buddhism, “death due to exhausted blessings” is regarded as one of the nine causes of death. Our blessings are like savings in an account: if your natural lifespan were to reach eighty, but you deplete your blessings by fifty, your life may come to an early end. From another perspective, some possessions may indeed bring comfort and pleasure, yet the effort we invest in obtaining them often consumes much of our time. Considering that every moment of our lives passes and never comes back, spending on certain things is in fact costing us our lives!

Two thousand years ago, the philosopher Socrates stood in a bustling marketplace and marveled “How many things I don’t need!” Today, our desires have kept growing, and the variety of goods available has multiplied beyond measure. Yet this abundance has not made our lives any easier. On the contrary, our pace has quickened, our stress has deepened, and we rarely have a moment to pause and ask ourselves:

Why are we so busy? Are all our efforts truly worthwhile if they are spent chasing things we may not even need?

Actually, we don't need much to live. When life is simple, we gain more time to enrich ourselves and to be with our loved ones. We can also slow down—watch flowers bloom and fade, and see clouds gather and glide. In this simplicity, we can release our burdens and seek the ultimate meaning of life.

2) Being Content with Fewer Desires Protects the Environment

Humans share a collective blessing by living on Earth. Cherishing our own blessings also means valuing humanity's shared prosperity and safeguarding our common home. While our desires are endless, resources are limited. To satisfy our desires, we have exploited nature, leading to the destruction of vast forests and arable land, soil erosion, and frequent natural disasters and human-made calamities. This is why so many visionaries are advocating for environmental protection.

Protecting the environment is a responsibility we all share, and none of us can escape responsibility for its degradation.

Our growing desires for food, clothing, shelter, and transportation are damaging our planet. Among these, the pollution caused by our dietary choices is significant. According to available data, producing one pound of meat in the U.S. requires 2,500 gallons of water—equivalent to the monthly water consumption of an average household. Additionally, a meat-based lifestyle consumes up to twelve times more water than a vegetarian one. Furthermore, waste and wastewater from poultry farming not only consumes water resources but also pollutes them, leading to long-term environmental damage.

Moreover, our need for clothing is no longer just about keeping warm. For example, when we pursue fashion made from fur, we directly threaten the survival of many animals. They are killed for their beautiful pelts, and this disrupts the harmony of nature and the ecological balance. Similarly, our demands for better housing have grown rapidly, even in developing economies such as China, real estate development remains unchecked. In recent years, cities have expanded into rural areas, while new houses in the countryside continue to encroach on farmland. In addition, the widespread

use of automobiles has undeniably made life more convenient, but it has also become a major cause of air pollution and a key driver of the global energy crisis.

When our desires go unchecked, we inevitably draw too much from nature, damaging the environment in the process. In doing so, we not only put our future at risk but also exhaust the blessings of generations to come. Therefore, being content with fewer desires is of great significance to environmental protection.

3) Being Content with Fewer Desires Supports Liberation

On a spiritual path, being content with fewer desires is a living principle we should adhere to. Desires push us to keep chasing external things, preventing the mind from finding true freedom. The more desires we have, the more restlessness and afflictions arise. If left unchecked, desire can cause us to lose both rationality and morality, becoming a major obstacle on the path of cultivation.

“The precepts are the rightful and conducive foundation for liberation.” The Buddha established the precepts to help his disciples eliminate disturbances and settle their minds on

cultivation. By living simply, we no longer have to spend our lives on daily survival—food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. Instead, we can devote our time and energy to spiritual practice and the pursuit of truth. Today, people value cost-effectiveness but rarely consider that investing time is, in fact, investing life itself. Shouldn't we also think about whether our time is well spent and what we truly gain from it?

The less desire we have, the less attachment and fewer obstacles we face on our path of practice. Thus, being content with fewer desires is the basic Buddhist attitude toward material desires. At the same time, we should continuously foster our wholesome desires for the Dharma, aspiring to attain Buddha-nature and liberate all beings. While letting go of personal desires, we should establish an infinite vow of compassion for all beings.

IV

FOCUS ON LIFE OR ON DEATH

Life and death are eternal topics that we all inevitably face. Today, we can travel through the skies and dive into the depths of the sea, yet we remain helpless in the face of death. Where do we go after death? Does life simply end there? Some say that since we are still alive and death has not yet come, there is no need to care about it; once we are dead, we can no longer think, so there is no need to pursue the truth—such questions, they argue, are nothing but needless worry. But is this really the case? As we are moving closer to the end of life with every passing moment, can we truly be at ease if we know nothing about death? Can we walk the right path in life? When death comes, will we be able to face it calmly? When we look back on our lives, can we do so

without regret?

When Prince Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) witnessed the suffering of aging, sickness, and death, he renounced his worldly life and embarked on a spiritual journey to seek life's ultimate truth. Moreover, in Buddhist practice, the contemplation of death, end-of-life care, and practices to help the departed attain liberation are all essential elements. So some people believe that Buddhism focuses only on death and ignores life. But is that true? What does Buddhism truly mean by “contemplating death”?

1. The Two Vital Issues of Life

Every day, many lives begin, and many also end. Birth is the beginning of life, while death is its end; together they shape the whole journey and are equally important. To understand life and death, we must see how they are connected.

Confucius once said, “If you do not understand life, how can you understand death?” Yet the reverse is equally true: “If you do not understand death, how can you understand

life?” Western philosophers have said that philosophy is a practice of reflecting on death—that to study philosophy is to learn how to prepare for it. This is not about constantly imagining ourselves dying, but about realizing that death is inevitable and learning to see life from a different angle.

It is precisely because death is inevitable that the value of life becomes clear, urging us to cherish our time in the world. In this sense, how we understand life and death directly shapes how we see life itself.

1) Focus on Life or on Death

All living beings share the instinct to stay alive. Even the smallest creatures, like ants, struggle to survive—how much more would human beings long to live? We live in this world seeking greater wealth, pursuing higher status, achieving success in our careers, and fulfilling our dreams. Yet all these pursuits depend on the simple fact that we are alive; without life, they lose all meaning.

In early times, humanity practiced fertility worship, pursued immortality through alchemy, and even today strives to preserve health through an endless stream of supplements

and wellness practices. All of these reveal our deep fascination with staying alive, for life means hope. A Chinese novelist once wrote, “Life may be the only thing in the universe worthy of worship; its nurturing, giving birth, and growing up are, in essence, profoundly awe-inspiring.” With life, we can create infinite possibilities. That is why we rejoice at a child’s birth and spare no effort to save lives when faced with illness or disaster. The ancients said, “To save one life is worth more than building a seven-tiered pagoda.” Yet many who offer help do so not for merit or reward, but from a sincere reverence for life and a refusal to see it fade away.

Yet life is fragile. From the moment we are born, each passing day carries us closer to the end. In youth, we may not yet feel the relentless passage of time, but once we grow old, the fear of death becomes impossible to avoid. As the saying goes, “In old age, each passing year is one less to live.” Every year that slips away is a year we cannot regain; every day that passes brings us one step nearer to the end. When a single breath fails to return, the next belongs to another life. Death is inevitable—everyone is equal and cannot escape. Perhaps that is why so many religions regard it as the ultimate

question. We may even say that it is precisely seeking the truth of death that gives birth to religion itself.

Christian faith is built upon the hope of eternal life. It teaches that earthly life is illusory, while heaven is the soul's eternal destination. Within this faith, eternal life is sanctified, and the death of Jesus is proclaimed as the act of salvation. Through sincere prayer, Christians believe that death can become the gateway to immortality. In the Bible, Jesus proclaimed to his people: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." But can Jesus truly grant new life from death? Will this hope for eternal life ultimately be fulfilled?

2) Does Buddhism Focus Only on Death

How does Buddhism view death? Why does it seem that Buddhism places special emphasis on death? There are four main reasons.

First, the Buddha was once a prince who enjoyed all worldly pleasures. Yet after witnessing the suffering of aging, sickness, and death, he deeply realized the illusory nature of

worldly life and resolutely renounced his royal life and devoted himself to spiritual cultivation. Touched by death, the Buddha was inspired to pursue the deathless path, which became his driving force toward liberation. In a sense, this aspiration helped pave the way for the birth of Buddhism. From the very beginning, people have often linked Buddhism with death—sometimes even seeing the two as one.

Second, in the Sravaka practice, the goal is to attain nirvana and achieve Arhatship. However, many people mistakenly equate nirvana with death, regarding it as the passing of a sage. For example, the Buddha's passing from this world is referred to as his entering nirvana. This raises the question: "If realizing nirvana is seen as the ultimate aim, does this not imply that Buddhism values death over life?" In fact, nirvana has two aspects—"complete nirvana" and "incomplete nirvana." At its heart, nirvana means to let go of afflictions and go beyond birth and death. It is not another name for death.

Third, this misunderstanding is tied to the prevalence of Pure Land Buddhism. Since Master Huiyuan founded this sect at Donglin Temple on Mount Lushan during the Eastern Jin Dynasty, the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss has

become a cherished destination for many Buddhists. What makes this practice exceptional is that it emphasizes reliance on Amitabha Buddha's vow power, unlike other sects that rely solely on individual effort. Because of this, Pure Land Buddhism has been more accessible to the general public. It became so widespread, particularly in the Ming and Qing dynasties, that "Every household recites Amitabha, every home venerates Avalokitesvara." This has led many to believe that the goal of studying Buddhism is solely to seek rebirth in the Pure Land and to hope for a better future life.

Fourth, Buddhist repentance rituals have further deepened this misunderstanding. Since the Yuan Dynasty, such ceremonies have been widespread. Especially in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, temples are so occupied with performing these services that they almost lose their role in guiding the public with Dharma. When people enter temples, they just burn a few sticks of incense and make prostrations. While praying for peace in this life, they also invite monastics to chant sutras and perform rituals when a family member has passed away. They do so in the hope that the deceased will reach a good destination, and to offer consolation to themselves and

their loved ones.

For these reasons, many people have come to believe that Buddhism is only concerned with death and serves to care for the deceased. This view makes some sense, but it also shows an incomplete and distorted understanding of Buddhism. Take the Pure Land tradition as an example: although it emphasizes reciting Amitabha Buddha's name and caring about one's destination after death, it differs fundamentally from the Christian idea of entering heaven. The Pure Land practice is grounded in self-effort, yet supported by reliance on Amitabha's vows. In other words, other-power only works through self-power. The *Amitabha Sutra* states that the Western Pure Land is "a gathering place of virtuous people, and those with few virtuous roots, meritorious blessings and other causal conditions cannot attain rebirth in that land." Clearly, rebirth in the Western Pure Land is not something one attains at will; it requires blessings, virtue, and wholesome roots. Where do such blessings come from? They come from self-cultivation in this human life, which includes the practices of faith, vows, and actions.

2. Buddhism Focuses on the Real Life

What, then, is the correct Buddhist understanding of life and death? It differs from both the materialist belief that death is the end and the idea of eternal life taught by other religions. Although this present life is brief, Buddhism views life as a ceaseless river—with neither beginning nor end. What's more, life can be transformed through practice. As such, Buddhism first emphasizes the meaning of this present life, and then cares about what comes after death. This focus is reflected in several key aspects.

1) Buddhism Values the Precious Human Life

Other religions regard heaven as the best destination, while Buddhism teaches that the precious human life—especially one blessed with leisure and the ability to study the Dharma—is far more precious than being reborn in the heavens. This is because the heavenly beings are only absorbed in pleasures, with no time for practice. Yet their happiness does not last forever; once their blessings are exhausted, they still have to wander in samsara.

In contrast, as human beings, we experience both suffering

and joy, and naturally wish to be free from suffering and attain happiness. Moreover, we possess the faculty of reason, enabling us to study the Buddha's teachings, abandon unwholesome actions, and cultivate virtue to transform our lives. This is why Buddhism teaches that truth and wisdom belong to the human realm, not the heavenly realms. Shakyamuni Buddha, our fundamental teacher, attained enlightenment here in the human world—not in a heavenly one.

However, obtaining a human body is a rare opportunity. The Buddha taught his disciples: "Those who gain a human body are as few as the dust on a fingernail; those who do not are as countless as the dust of the earth." This vivid contrast highlights how precious human life truly is. Thus, Buddhism places great value on the human identity and regards it as a crucial turning point in the cycle of samsara. Among the six realms, beings in the hell and hungry ghosts suffer too deeply to practice the Dharma, animals are too ignorant to develop wisdom, and heavenly beings too absorbed in pleasure to seek liberation. In the human realm, we live amid both suffering and joy and have the ability to practice. To change

our destiny and ultimately attain Buddhahood, we must first secure this rare human rebirth.

2) Buddhism Values Present-Moment Cultivation

We all know the idea of living in the present moment, but how deeply do we understand its true meaning? Buddhism teaches that life is like a rushing torrent: the past has already gone and cannot be changed, while the future has yet to come and remains unknown. What we truly grasp is only this very moment. Does that mean we should just eat, drink, and be merry while we can? We must remember that the infinite past finds its end in the “now,” and the endless future begins at “this moment.” Every thought we give rise to, every word we speak or choose not to, every action or stillness in the present moment shapes our future life. If we wish for a brighter future, we must begin here and now: by clarifying our life’s purpose, cultivating aspiration, and planning wisely for the future. That is, we must know what kind of life we seek and what we should be doing today to realize it.

Many people mistakenly believe that Buddhist practice aims solely for future lives. In fact, Buddhism teaches the

principle of “finding joy in the Dharma here and now.” It means we can benefit immediately from practicing Dharma, bringing peace and happiness to both body and mind. Life is an endless journey of accumulation. By practicing Dharma each day, we are continuously enhancing our lives. Students of the Mindful Peace Academy have experienced this deeply for themselves: by following the Approaches of Study and Service to the Public, our afflictions and confusions fade, while our wisdom and compassion continue to grow. Our minds become more open and joyful. These are clear signs that we are moving toward liberation.

What is liberation? It is the gradual process of freeing ourselves from the bonds of ignorance, delusion, and karma, and ultimately from the cycle of birth and death itself. So we do not have to wait until death to experience the benefits of practice. Even now, in daily life, we can experience the joy and freedom that come from Dharma practice. Only when we master ourselves now can we master death when it comes. If we cannot master ourselves now, how could we possibly be free when death comes?

3) Buddhism Values Improving Real Life

Master Taixu (1890–1947) advocated “Buddhism of Human Life,” emphasizing that “Dharma is the great wisdom of life.” Throughout my years of teaching and spreading the Dharma, I have remained faithful to this vision. By interpreting Buddhist teachings in a more accessible way, I hope to help people apply this wisdom to all aspects of daily life, so that they can truly benefit from it.

In the course of spreading the Dharma, Buddhism has taken on many forms. One is a philosophical Buddhism for the elite, which developed deep and complete schools such as Tiantai, Huayan, Sanlun, and Yogacara. Another is a folk Buddhism for ordinary people. They pray for blessings, pay homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and have only a basic understanding of the law of cause and effect. However, many modern practitioners lack the time to study such deep teachings, yet they are not content with simply praying for peace. How can we help them appreciate the extraordinary wisdom of Buddhism and inspire them to take a genuine interest in the practice?

Buddhism of Human Life aims to interpret the Dharma in simple and accessible language, helping us understand life

and guide our daily lives with Buddhist wisdom. Although each Buddhist school has its own deep teachings, they all share the same goal—to help us understand life and the world more clearly, and to make us better. In fact, we can understand every problem with Buddhist wisdom, because at the root, all problems in the world are human problems—problems of the mind. Since ancient times, Buddhism has been known as a “study of the mind.” It offers both theory and practice to help us understand our minds and transform them in many ways. Buddhism of Human Life follows this same path, but it begins with real life itself—guiding us to attain liberation through practice in the present moment.

4) Buddhism Aims to Relieve the Suffering of All Beings

As Buddhists, we should not only seek to free ourselves from our own suffering but also care deeply for all sentient beings—seeing their suffering as our own and their needs as our own. Mahayana Buddhism teaches the Six Perfections and the Four Means of Conversion, which serve as skillful means to benefit others. The Six Perfections are generosity, morality, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom; the Four Means of Conversion are generosity,

kind words, beneficial actions, and collaborative work. All of them begin with generosity, which Buddhism calls cultivating a field of merit. In the world, charity often focuses on relieving poverty and hardship, while in Buddhism generosity goes beyond material giving—it also includes the giving of the Dharma and the giving of fearlessness. This is because people have different forms of suffering, and it can not be truly resolved by material aid alone.

In his causal stage of practice, the Buddha went through countless lives to liberate sentient beings from suffering. He practiced for the sake of all beings and attained Buddhahood for them. Many believe that paying respects to the Buddha or reciting his name is enough for practice, but they often overlook the importance of helping others. This neglect leads them away from the true spirit of the buddhas and bodhisattvas—to lead all beings toward liberation. To study Buddhism is not only to study what the Buddha taught, but also to live as the Buddha lived.

5) The Sutras Teach How to Care About Real Life

Buddhist practice includes the Human and Heavenly Vehicle,

the Sravaka Vehicle, and the Bodhisattva Vehicle. Although its ultimate goal is to guide us toward enlightenment, we must rely on the foundation of the Human and Heavenly Vehicle—that is, compassionate care for real life.

The *Medicine Buddha's Sutra* describes the Medicine Buddha's boundless compassion for sentient beings in the Saha World. He aspires to satisfy their material needs: "May I enable all beings to gain an inexhaustible supply of what they need, so none will suffer from lack." He also aspires to free them from the suffering of illness: "If beings suffer from severe illness, without help or shelter, having no medicine or healer, without family or home, and trapped in poverty and distress—when they hear my name, their illnesses will be cured, and their bodies and minds will find peace." Furthermore, he aspires to remove disasters and difficulties for all beings, to help them attain dignified appearances, and to fulfill their wishes for health and longevity. Even at the moment of their death, he promises never to abandon them but to help them achieve rebirth in the Pure Lands of the ten directions, according to their own aspirations.

Furthermore, the *Sigalovada Sutra* and the *Sutra on the*

Ten Wholesome Ways of Action also reflect Buddhist care for real life. Buddhism believes that the fundamental law of the world is “dependent origination and causality.” Our destiny does not depend on any divine will, but on our own actions. The Buddha simply shows us what to do and what not to do, reveals the results of good and evil, and teaches the methods to end suffering and find happiness. Yet transforming our lives relies on our own dedicated practice.

The Buddha attained enlightenment as a human being—he was neither a deity nor a divine messenger. Christianity teaches that humans were created by God, and their fate is completely in his hands. Buddhism, however, teaches that the difference between ordinary beings and buddhas lies only in a single thought—between delusion and awakening. Each of us can start right now, improving ourselves through practice and uncovering our innate Buddha-nature. The Buddha taught for forty-five years to help all beings attain happiness in this life, happiness in future lives, and the joy of ultimate liberation. Therefore, Buddhism first focuses on the present happiness of all beings. It further encourages us to make full use of this precious human life as a vessel of

practice, allowing our lives to move toward awakening.

3. Buddhism Emphasizes One's Destination After Death

Buddhism cares not only about real life, but also about the contemplation of death and what comes after. Without such reflection, people easily become obsessed with pursuing worldly fame and fortune, completely forgetting that death is inevitable. When death comes, many find themselves completely unprepared and unable to accept it. Some become distressed, feeling life is unfair; some feel lost and helpless, not knowing what to do; still others suffer greatly from desperate medical efforts. This is especially true for young and middle-aged people, for they are busy with thriving careers and full of future plans. Yet when death suddenly comes, everything comes to an end. Faced with this, they are unwilling to let go of what they have and deeply cling to life, while feeling fearful and uncertain about where they will go after death. They do not wish to die, yet cannot avoid it. Only then may they begin to understand why ancient wisdom regarded a “good death” as one of life’s Five Blessings.

Death is life’s greatest trial—the final test we all must face.

Whether we can pass it successfully depends on the effort we put into daily practice. By constantly contemplating death, we learn to view life through its lens, allowing us to make wiser choices, instead of being caught up in temporary gains and losses. We come to see what is fleeting, like mist that quickly passes, and what truly matters and must be firmly held. In this regard, Buddhism offers two approaches: one is to cultivate the right mindset by contemplating death; the other is to provide end-of-life care to help the dying maintain right mindfulness at their final moment.

1) Contemplating Death to Cherish Life and Inspire Diligent Practice

Master Yinguang (1861–1940), a renowned patriarch of the Pure Land School, hung the Chinese character “death” on the wall of his room to remind himself: “Practice urgently and diligently, as if your head were on fire.” This is because people are easily deceived by illusion of life. Since we did not die the day before, nor yesterday, nor today, we begin to feel as if we will live forever. It seems we still have plenty of time to practice, so there is no need to hurry. But the truth is, death can come at any moment.

Which is closer—tomorrow or death? No one can say for sure. The *Precious Garland* tells us, “Human life, surrounded by the causes of death, is like an oil lamp flickering in the wind.” Life is short and fragile, like a flame that can be blown out at any moment by the winds of karma. Especially in the Degenerate Age of Dharma, beings are born with short lives and little merit. The causes of death are many, while the causes of life are few. The Buddha also reminds us: “Human life hangs by a single breath. If one breath does not come, the next breath belongs to the next life.” The purpose of contemplating death is to help us realize how rare and precious this human life is, and how fortunate we are to encounter the Dharma—so we make the most of this opportunity to practice diligently while we can.

Countdowns are common in modern life. For example, in China, the countdown to the national college entrance exam often begins a year in advance. The idea is to turn pressure into motivation, so that students won’t dare to slack off. In fact, contemplating death is life’s ultimate countdown. The pressure it brings is even greater, because we do not know how much time we have left. All we know is this: with each

day that passes, there is one day less. Have you made it count?

Life is short. But have we made good use of these few decades? “When we are young, our hearts are bound to our parents; in middle age, to our spouse and children; and in old age, to our grandchildren.” The little time we leave for ourselves is often spent chasing fame and fortune. Only when death comes do we realize: the wealth and status we gave up our lives for, the loved ones we gave our hearts to—none can save us. Even this body that has accompanied us day and night cannot be taken with us.

A revered ancient master once said, “When we realize how precious it is to have the time and ability to practice, we regret wasting it on meaningless pursuits. When we understand how rare it is to obtain a human body, we regret living carelessly. And when we realize death is certain and its timing is unpredictable, we refuse to engage in anything that hinders a good death or goes against the Dharma.” Only by contemplating death can we give rise to true detachment from the world; only through such detachment can we awaken a genuine aspiration for the Dharma. Guided by the Dharma, we learn to make wise choices at every stage of life and to

live each moment fully. Whether we are on or off the meditation cushion—listening to teachings, working, or carrying out our daily lives—our minds can remain in harmony with wholesome Dharma.

2) Guiding Life Through End-of-Life Care

Buddhism places great importance on end-of-life care, which holds profound meaning in two key respects. For the dying person, the ability to remain mindful in their final moments is crucial. It determines whether they can receive Amitabha Buddha's compassionate guidance and attain rebirth in the Pure Land, directly shaping their future destiny. Although such mindfulness depends largely on one's lifelong cultivation, when death comes, they face great challenges. At that moment, the physical body undergoes the disintegration of the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind, bringing intense physical and mental suffering. At the same time, the past karma may manifest, disturbing the mind and obstructing rebirth in the Pure Land. As a result, a lifelong practice may fail to bear fruit at this final moment.

Because of this, few people can face death with complete

confidence. Thus, the support and compassionate presence of others become essential. This may include offering mental and spiritual guidance to help the dying person let go of attachment to this life and strengthen their aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land. In addition, reciting Amitabha Buddha's name together helps sustain their faith and invites the compassionate guidance of Amitabha Buddha at this critical moment.

For volunteers, end-of-life care is a precious opportunity to strengthen their own practice and embody the bodhisattva spirit. As ordinary beings, we can easily become numb; merely reflecting on death in theory may soon lose its power. This is why we must continually contemplate and deepen our awareness. Taking part in end-of-life care is a vivid, living reminder that death is always near—we never know when it will come for us. If we are not fully prepared, what state of mind will we have when death comes? And where will we go after we die? Are we truly ready?

So, Buddhism values both this present life and the life to come. This life is the foundation for practice—we must seize the opportunity to listen to the Dharma and cultivate

diligently. But this life is short, and the path within samsara is full of dangers; even a small misstep can make us fall into the lower realms. That is why we must also care about our destination after death—whether to attain rebirth in the Pure Land, free from regression, or to return to the Saha World through the power of our aspirations, making it the starting point for our next life of practice. Contemplating death serves as a bridge between these two aims: it helps us cherish life more deeply and prepare for what lies ahead, so that when the final moment comes, we can meet it with calm acceptance—at peace, as if returning home.

V

BENEFIT ONESELF OR BENEFIT OTHERS

As members of society, we all have responsibilities, and Buddhists are no exception. Unfortunately, many people still regard Buddhists as selfish. They believe that monastics leave their families to live a life of ease, and say that they neglect their parents' kindness, fail to fulfill family responsibilities, and show no care about the suffering of the world. Although this view has eased in recent years with the growing spread of Dharma, it remains difficult to change at its root. When someone chooses the monastic path, do their parents see it as an act of ingratitude or of gratitude? Does society view it as an act of taking responsibility, or escaping it? Ultimately, are Buddhists pursuing their own benefit, or the benefit of

others? To answer this question, we must first understand what benefit truly means.

1. What Is Benefit

Although people strive for different goals in life, they all seek benefit. As the Chinese saying goes, “The world bustles for profit; the world hustles for gain.” On a basic level, people rely on basic materials to survive. In ancient times, people made what they needed themselves and exchanged goods through bartering; today, it involves industrial production and the trade of goods, all aimed at acquiring and exchanging benefits. On a broader level, personal status, power, and honor, as well as a nation’s resources, territory, and sovereignty, are all forms of benefit. In short, anything that satisfies one’s desires can be called a benefit. The pursuit of benefit has run throughout human history—it has driven social progress and improved living standards.

As Buddhists, we cannot avoid the topic of benefit. Even monastics, who do not engage in productive labor, still rely on the four requisites: food, clothing, bedding, and medicine. That’s why people say, “The Dharma wheel turns only

after the food wheel spins.” A monastery has two primary responsibilities: first, to safeguard an environment where monastics can fully devote themselves to spiritual practice; and second, to share the Dharma with the wider community. Both require proper facilities and steady support.

Beyond material gain, Buddhism often speaks of the benefits of the Dharma—both immediate and ultimate. The Buddha frequently reminded his disciples that while seeking their own benefit, they should also work for the well-being of others, so that more sentient beings might also benefit from the Dharma. Thus, Buddhism does not shy away from discussing benefit; rather, it regards benefit as closely connected with our life. So, how should we understand the true meaning of benefit?

2. The Relationship Between Morality and Benefit

When we speak of benefit, we must also speak of desire and morality. If desire is the driving force behind our pursuit of benefit, then morality is what sets its boundaries. Desire is endless, so is the pursuit of benefit. Without moral restraint, this pursuit can quickly spin out of control, leading to all

sorts of problems, and even crime. The harm caused by a profit-driven mindset is everywhere in today's world. In one way or another, we have all become its victims, and often, directly or indirectly, those who cause harm. So, are benefit and morality really at odds with each other, and do we have to choose one at the expense of the other?

As early as the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770 BCE – 221 BCE), there were already debates about morality and benefit. The *Analects* says, “The noble person is guided by morality; the petty person is driven by gain.” This sets morality and benefit in opposition—linking morality with the noble person, and benefit with the petty person. Furthermore, in the *Mencius*, King Hui of Liang asked Mencius, who had come from afar, how he could benefit his state. Mencius replied that if rulers thought only of benefit, conflicts among states would only deepen. He advocated governing by moral principle, saying: “Why must Your Majesty speak of benefit? Benevolence and morality are all that matter.” In this way, morality and benefit came to be seen as opposing forces.

In the context of Confucian culture, people place great

importance on morality. But when morality and self-interest are seen as opposites, it implies that to pursue morality, one must give up self-interest. This creates a dilemma: some people care deeply about their own interests, yet also wish to uphold a virtuous image. As a result, they become hypocrites—saying one thing and doing another.

So, must morality and benefit really be mutually exclusive? Buddhism teaches that the key lies in how we seek benefit. If we seek self-interest in dishonest ways, morality and benefit do become opposing forces—virtue is lost, and whatever we gain will not last. But if we follow moral principles and pursue wealth through ethical and lawful means, there is no conflict between the two. In fact, benefits grounded in morality will continue to grow.

For example, in business, if we act with integrity, show kindness, consider others' interests, and strive for mutual benefit, others will naturally be willing to build long-term cooperation with us. Ancient Chinese valued honest business—offering genuine goods at fair prices and deceiving neither the old nor the young—for only in this way could one win the trust of others. All of the time-honored brands that have survived to

this day, both in China and abroad, are all models of honest business. By acting with honesty, they have not only earned social recognition but also found the very path to prosperity. This is truly a win-win for both benefit and morality, for success in business and growth in character. It brings benefit to ourselves and others—now and in times to come.

In short, morality and benefit are not opposites, but interdependent and mutually enhancing. Morality provides the guiding principles for pursuing benefit, while benefit is the fruit of moral practice. Only by pursuing benefit with morality at heart can that benefit truly last.

3. How Does Buddhism View Benefit

1) Is Buddhism Against Pursuing Benefit

We know that the Buddha once gave up his royal throne to seek enlightenment. Among Buddhist practitioners, monastics must renounce all possessions, and even some lay followers choose to give up their careers to devote themselves to the practice. As a result, some people believe that Buddhism does not value benefit, and even rejects it. But is that really true?

First, Buddhism does not reject the pursuit of rightful benefit. Especially for lay practitioners, wealth earned through lawful means and diligent work is called “pure wealth” in the sutras. Such wealth can meet one’s needs while serving as a means to benefit others and cultivate virtue. The key is that it must follow both the law and the precepts.

Therefore, Buddhists should be especially careful when choosing their professions. Some laypeople eagerly make donations, sponsor the printing of sutras, or help build temples and Buddha statues, but may overlook whether their occupations are in harmony with the Dharma. There are also those who know their work violates the Five Precepts, yet believe that making offerings to the Three Jewels can make up for their wrongdoing. In fact, wholesome and unwholesome actions each bear their own karmic results—one cannot cancel out the other. If we do not correct the cause, the harm from a wrong livelihood may be greater than any benefit we gain.

In addition to tangible material benefits, Buddhism also emphasizes the benefits of virtuous deeds and the intangible wealth of merit. Virtuous deeds are those that benefit not only oneself but also others, not only in the present but also

in the future. The wealth of merit, often called Dharma wealth, stems from Buddhist practice. In the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha uses seven comparisons to illustrate the greatness of this merit: “Suppose a person offers heaps of the seven treasures equal to all the Sumeru mountains within a three thousandfold world system; and if another person were to accept, uphold, recite, or explain just four lines of verse from this sutra, the merit of the latter surpasses that of the former by hundreds of thousands, millions, and billions, and beyond—far beyond what any calculation or analogy could express.” Simply put, reciting and practicing the *Diamond Sutra* brings greater benefits than any form of material giving. Similar teachings also appear in other Buddhist texts, such as the *Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* and the *Original Vows of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sutra*.

Wisdom holds greater value than material wealth. Material gain is limited; even with immense wealth, one cannot guarantee a life free from worries or find true happiness. But a person with wisdom can remain free, peaceful and joyful in any situation. Wisdom brings not only present peace and joy,

but also the ultimate happiness, along with all worldly and transcendent merits. When we understand this, we can truly grasp the benefits described in the *Diamond Sutra*.

Moreover, while Buddhism encourages the pursuit of benefit, it also teaches us not to cling to it. This reflects what the *Diamond Sutra* teaches—that true giving is free from the three forms of clinging. First, not clinging to the giver—one should give without feeling proud or superior. Second, not clinging to the receiver—showing neither love nor hate, closeness nor distance, but treating everyone equally. Third, not clinging to the gift itself—not worrying about whether it is expensive or cheap, but giving freely to those in need. Only giving in this spirit is truly complete. Not clinging to the benefits does not mean there is no benefit. On the contrary, because we do not cling to benefits, the benefits become boundless—beyond anything we can imagine.

2) Is Studying Buddhism Only for Self-Benefit

Many people view Buddhists as detached from the world—focused solely on personal practice and indifferent to society. However, this view is one-sided. In fact, Buddhism has

two main paths: Theravada and Mahayana, also known as the Sravaka Vehicle and the Bodhisattva Vehicle. The word “vehicle” refers to a means of transportation. The Sravaka Vehicle is like a small boat—meant for individual crossing, and focused on personal liberation. The Bodhisattva Vehicle, by contrast, is like a great ship—able to carry all beings to the other shore, benefiting both oneself and others. This difference lies primarily in their aspirations. Because their aspirations differ, the beings they can benefit also differ.

Sravaka practitioners give rise to the mind of renunciation, “seeing the three realms as a burning house and viewing birth and death as enemies.” Their goal is to quickly attain nirvana and free themselves from samsara. This is why they are sometimes called “self-deliverers,” as if they care only about their own liberation and ignore the world’s suffering. In fact, they also cultivate the Four Immeasurables—loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Even today, in Theravada Buddhist countries, the monastic community remains closely connected with society and actively engages in spreading the Dharma and benefiting others. The reason they are seen as more self-focused is that, compared to the Bodhisattva Path,

they do not see altruism as an unshakable responsibility, nor do they aspire to benefit all beings in endless future lives. However, we should keep in mind that this form of self-benefit is very different from the selfishness that people generally understand.

Practitioners of the Bodhisattva Path not only cultivate renunciation and eliminate afflictions, but also generate bodhicitta—an altruistic mission to benefit all beings. This altruistic aspiration is limitless: it extends across all directions and endures throughout the infinite future. In a sense, bodhicitta is both the extension and the perfection of renunciation.

4. Self-Benefit and Altruism

Self-benefit means protecting one's own interests, while altruism is about caring for the well-being of others. Many people see these two as opposites. They believe that helping others must come at the cost of one's own interests, and that pursuing one's own benefit inevitably harms others' benefit. But are self-benefit and altruism truly in opposition?

1) Selfishness Does Not Equal Self-Benefit

From a social perspective, rightful self-benefit can also benefit others. For instance, our survival today depends on the work of others, while our own work, in turn, supports many others. Whatever our occupation, we rely on one another and share in each other's well-being. Even the idea of win-win reflects this same unity of benefiting oneself and benefiting others.

However, for some, self-benefit means maximizing profits at any cost, even through dishonest or harmful means. Strictly speaking, this is not self-benefit but selfishness. Such actions harm others, directly or indirectly, and create unwholesome karma that leads to one's own future suffering. If we lose our morality for the sake of profit, that loss is far greater than any physical harm, for while the body's lifespan is limited, the seeds of negative actions will continue to bear fruit in the future. Therefore, selfishness can never lead to true self-benefit; on the contrary, it harms oneself now and in the future.

2) Self-Benefit Cannot Lead to Liberation

To truly benefit ourselves, we must possess great wisdom; without it, things often turn out the opposite of what we

want. We may think that we're acting for our own good—making careful plans and calculations—yet end up bringing ourselves even more trouble. This happens because our lives are governed by greed, anger, and ignorance, as well as by wrong views and chaotic emotions. As a result, we often make wrong rather than right choices.

Because people are attached to the “self,” they further cling to their money, career, and family, making themselves the center of everything. They seek whatever benefits themselves, even at the cost of others' well-being. This is why we see intrigue in politics and deception in business. Even within the so-called “ivory tower” of schools, there are open and hidden struggles for titles and projects. All of these leave the mind restless and far from peace.

Some say, “As long as I do not harm anyone, that's enough. Why should I benefit others?” Although they are well-off, they spend their days wasting their blessings, squandering money and chasing after pleasure. Or they take joy in hoarding money—thereby losing the true value of wealth. Such behaviors, while seemingly safeguarding personal interests, actually leave them spiritually empty. They constantly fear

being taken advantage of, worry about gains and losses, and ultimately become weighed down by their wealth.

3) By Benefiting Others, Bodhisattvas Attain Great Freedom

The *Lamrim* teaches that “Self-attachment is the gateway to all decline, while altruism forms the foundation of all merit.” Esteemed Master Tsongkhapa illustrates this with two examples. Since beginningless time, sentient beings have been preoccupied only with themselves, thereby creating endless delusion and suffering. In contrast, buddhas and bodhisattvas devote themselves to benefiting others—and through this selflessness, they perfect their own compassion and wisdom. This clearly shows that selfishness does not bring true benefit; only selflessness does.

Everything we do for others contributes to our own path to awakening. This requires us to let go of self-attachment and embrace all beings with a selfless heart. We must take their needs as our inescapable responsibility, fulfilling the bodhisattva aspiration: “Not seeking happiness for myself, but wishing all beings to be free from suffering.”

4) The Unity of Self-Benefit and Altruism

There was once a saying: “Never seek personal gain, only benefit others.” It was held up as the highest moral standard in China. But in Buddhism, benefiting oneself and benefiting others are seen as one. What Buddhism rejects is selfishness—not self-benefit.

First, altruism must be grounded in self-benefit. Helping others requires both wisdom and ability. Without them, we may not only fail to truly help but also trigger afflictions in others and become entangled ourselves—like “a clay bodhisattva crossing a river, unable even to save itself.” This is why Buddhism emphasizes not just compassion, but even more so, wisdom. Without the guidance of wisdom, compassion driven solely by emotion, what we might call blind or excessive compassion, may end up benefiting neither oneself nor others. Therefore, bodhicitta, the aspiration to benefit others, must be rooted in the mind of renunciation, the aspiration to free oneself from samsara. Only with this foundation can we remain detached while helping others, clearly discern causes and conditions, and bring them real benefit.

Second, the highest form of self-benefit must be realized through benefiting others. As the *Practices and Vows of*

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva teaches: “All sentient beings are the roots of the tree, and all buddhas and bodhisattvas are its flowers and fruits. By benefiting sentient beings with the water of great compassion, the wisdom flowers and fruits of the buddhas and bodhisattvas are thereby brought to fulfillment.” This teaches us that without benefiting others, we cannot achieve great compassion or attain Buddhahood.

Compassion and wisdom are the two core pillars of the Bodhisattva Path. Commonly, it is believed that altruism can foster compassion, while wisdom can only be attained through the practice of emptiness. In fact, altruism can also help dissolve self-attachment and develop wisdom. Self-attachment arises from a mistaken notion of self, which we continuously repeat and strengthen, until we lose touch with our true nature. Overcoming this self-attachment is the most difficult part of Buddhist practice. For many practitioners, relying solely on emptiness meditation may not be enough. By engaging in purely altruistic actions, we can gradually reduce self-attachment as we benefit others.

In this sense, benefiting others is the ultimate form of benefiting ourselves. This is the method of practice that buddhas

and bodhisattvas have revealed to us after their profound realizations. When we are self-centered, we neither truly benefit ourselves nor others. Take the parent-child relationship for example. Some parents spoil their children, unintentionally nurturing their bad habits, while others create tension, leading to poor communication. Both outcomes arise from a lack of wisdom—focusing on personal feelings rather than understanding the needs of others. The same principle applies to charitable activities. Without wisdom, even good intentions may leave one powerless to act and may even create new problems for society.

In summary, Buddhism advocates for a harmonious integration of self-benefit and altruism, grounded in wisdom and compassion. Without wisdom, we cannot truly benefit ourselves, let alone others. Without compassion, at most we might help others occasionally, but would not take it as an inescapable responsibility. Only with a vast altruistic mind can we ultimately achieve self-benefit. This is why, after attaining profound wisdom, the Buddha also perfected great compassion; having accomplished self-benefit, he further benefited all beings, and thus attained supreme perfect enlightenment.

VI

TRANSCENDING THE WORLD OR ENGAGING WITH THE WORLD

Traditionally, monasteries were seen as secluded places, away from worldly affairs. Renouncing the household life was viewed as cutting ties with the world, leaving loved ones behind. Chan poems have conveyed the idea of coolness and tranquility, such as “In the ancient woods where no path bears human trace, from deep within the mountains—whence comes the sounding bell?” and “The winding path leads to a secluded place, where the Chan adobe is surrounded by flowers and trees.” These descriptions gave the impression that monasteries and monks were beyond this world. However, in today’s Buddhist community, many monasteries are actively engaging in Dharma propagation,

charitable work, cultural activities, and other endeavors that are vibrant, diverse, and aligned with contemporary trends. These efforts extend to various fields, including business, the arts, and psychology, exerting significant influence on society. From this perspective, monasteries serve as educational institutions, offering wisdom on life and methods for cultivating the mind to the public. So, are monastics truly transcending the world or engaging with it?

Before delving into this question, it is essential to first understand what Buddhism means by the term “*shi jie* (world).” According to the *Surangama Sutra*, “*Shi* refers to the flow of time, and *jie* refers to spatial directions.” The flow of time includes past, present, and future, while spatial directions consist of east, west, south, north, southeast, northeast, southwest, northwest, as well as up and down. Together, these are known as the ten directions and three periods of time. As this makes clear, the “world” refers to time and space.

When we talk about the world, we usually refer to the Earth. However, in Buddhist sutras, the number of worlds is as countless as the grains of sand in the Ganges River,

immeasurable and infinite. The world we live in, known as the Saha World, consists of the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm. The sentient beings here include celestial beings, humans, asuras, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals, known as the Six Forms of Beings. Most of them belong to the Desire Realm, with some celestial beings residing in the Form Realm and the Formless Realm.

The world perceived by sentient beings depends on their cognitive capacity. For humans, this refers to the Six Sense Faculties and the Six Consciousnesses: what the eyes see, the ears hear, the nose smells, the tongue tastes, the body feels, and the mind perceives. In other words, we can only perceive the world within the scope of our own perception. Yet what we know through our sense faculties is very limited and does not represent the true reality of the world.

For instance, the world we saw in our youth was certainly different from how we see it now, as our capacity for cognition has changed. In addition, differences in education, professions, and life experiences all influence the depth and breadth of how we understand the world. The ancients said, “Read ten thousand books and travel ten thousand miles,” as

two ways to broaden one's horizons and deepen one's understanding of the world as much as possible.

1. The Public's Attitudes Toward the World

Our attitudes toward the world is commonly known as our worldview. Many people think this concept is somewhat abstract—a philosophical issue that seems unrelated to real life. In fact, this attitude directly influences our choices and actions, as what we say and do does not occur without reason but is rooted in our thoughts and understanding. Ultimately, it all comes down to our views on life, the world, and values. While the three views emphasize different aspects, they are fundamentally consistent. If our understanding is flawed, it may lead to wrong choices and inappropriate actions. Therefore, having a correct worldview is essential.

So, what are the prevailing attitudes toward the world among the public? Below are two representative viewpoints.

1) Greed

Ordinary people are full of greed and attachment to the world. First and foremost is the attachment to the self,

which is also humanity's greatest attachment. Following this are the attachments to wealth, status, family, relationships, and everything we possess. In Buddhism, these are known as "the self" and "what belongs to the self."

After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha realized that everything in the world is a mere illusion arising from various causes and conditions. Things come into being when conditions are present and cease when conditions are absent, as expressed in the teaching: "All phenomena arise due to causes and conditions, and all phenomena perish due to causes and conditions." The concept of "self" is likewise merely an aggregation of the Five Aggregates—form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. However, due to ignorance, ordinary beings cling to various non-self things as the self, such as the body or social identity. In reality, these things only have a temporary connection to us.

Why do we identify these aspects as the "self"? Because we have lost ourselves, we grasp at everything around us; and because we do not understand our true nature, we seek various substitutes and mistake them for the real "me." After establishing the "self," we feel the need to seek further

support—wealth, relationships, family, and social connections—clinging to everything connected to the “self” as “mine.” Once this identification is established, attachment arises, leading to a deep dependence.

Since these things represent the “self,” they are considered very important. Once lost, the “self” is affected and may even collapse entirely, which is why we wish for everything related to us to remain unchanged. However, the world is impermanent, and this truth continually challenges our assumptions, revealing that everything is temporary and must undergo the process of forming, existing, decaying, and vanishing. These changes are natural, much like the transition from spring to autumn or the blooming and withering of flowers. Yet, because we cling to the illusion of permanence, we fear loss, become anxious, and lack a sense of security. This is the attachment, fear, and delusional dream referred to in the *Heart Sutra*.

In this world, births, deaths, accidents, or even disasters occur every moment, yet these events may not necessarily affect us much. What can influence us are the things related to us, especially those we are attached to. The more we

are attached to, the greater the chance of being affected; the stronger the attachment, the deeper the afflictions it brings.

2) Apathy

The opposite of greed is apathy—a state of losing interest in anything. For example, the “dispirited culture” that has become popular in recent years describes young people who feel aimless and hopeless, living in a state of decadence and numbness. Why has this subculture gradually become widespread and even turned into a societal malaise of our times?

First, chasing after the Five Desires is exhausting. Once indulgence exceeds what we truly need, it brings both physical and mental burdens. As Laozi said, “The five colors blind our eyes. The five notes deafen our ears. The five flavors deaden our palates. The chase and hunt madden our hearts.” In today’s era of material abundance, people are stimulated by material pleasures on one hand, yet are also fatigued by excessive stimulation on the other. Second, the rising standard of living in modern society has brought about increasing pressure for survival. Due to intense competition, many people face repeated setbacks in life and work, unable to

attain what they desire, often leading them to the other extreme. Third, some people are high-minded by nature. Seeing the impurities of the world, they keep a distance from society in order to protect themselves, unwilling to go with the current. Fourth, seeing the absurdity of the world and the illusory nature of life, some people feel that nothing is meaningful to pursue, so they lose interest and even struggle to find a reason to live.

In fact, these two attitudes have existed since ancient times, but they have become particularly apparent today.

2. Religion's Attitudes Toward the World

1) Other Religions' Attitudes

So, how do other religions view the world? In the West, Christianity teaches that the material world is temporary and illusory, with heaven as its eternal destination. People should believe in God and perform good deeds to secure their place in heaven and attain eternal life.

In India, within the Eastern tradition, Brahmanism has a history of over 3,000 years and later evolved into Hinduism,

which remains a major religion today. Additionally, there are various other religions. During the Buddha's lifetime, there were 96 different non-Buddhist schools of thought. These religions have diverse practices and spiritual experiences, but they primarily focus on the cycle of samsara and the path to liberation. On one hand, they provide explanations for samsara, and on the other hand, they propose methods for achieving liberation. These religions generally view the world as full of suffering and illusion, leading to a sense of detachment from worldly life.

2) Buddhism's Attitudes

The monastic system in Buddhism leads many to view it as pessimistic toward life. After all, why would one renounce worldly pleasures and pursuits? In many literary works, the reasons for taking monastic vows are often attributed to career setbacks or emotional distress. While such cases do exist, judging Buddhism as world-weary based solely on this perspective is one-sided.

True renunciation is never a reluctant escape after encountering setbacks, but rather a proactive transcendence upon

seeing the true nature of the world. Worldly individuals, due to ignorance and karmic delusion, live immersed in the habits of greed, anger, and delusion. These are the three major viruses of the inner world, which have long become the dominant forces of life, continually generating suffering, birth and death, and the cycle of samsara. Renunciation is a responsibility for one's future life—a commitment to liberate oneself from ignorance and attain enlightenment. To achieve this, one must let go of attachment, eliminate disturbances, and devote oneself to diligent practice. This requires immense wisdom and courage.

The ancients said: "Becoming a monk is a truly heroic act beyond the capability of generals and ministers." This is because generals and ministers merely need to conquer external enemies, while renunciation requires overcoming our own worldly habits. The greatest opponent in life is not others but ourselves. To achieve this goal, we must endure what ordinary people cannot endure and accomplish what ordinary people cannot accomplish. Especially in today's era of rampant material desires, where temptations are everywhere, spiritual practice is more challenging than ever before.

But we must understand that “letting go” in Buddhism means freeing the mind from attachment, not rejecting the world or cutting off our relationship with it. Instead, it is about attaining a state of transcendence, as expressed in the saying: “Dwell in the world as if in empty space, like a lotus untouched by water.” This shows that the fundamental difference between renunciation and pessimism toward life lies in their nature: renunciation is active and positive, while pessimism toward life is passive and negative.

3. Engage in Worldly Affairs with a Transcendent Mind

For Mahayana Buddhists, it is essential to cultivate not just the mind of renunciation but also Bodhicitta; not only to attain wisdom and eliminate afflictions, but also to develop loving-kindness and compassion to liberate countless beings. “Loving-kindness” means giving happiness—when sentient beings lack joy, bodhisattvas help them to obtain happiness. “Compassion” means removing suffering—when beings are submerged in an ocean of misery, bodhisattvas help to free them from suffering.

Bodhisattvas not only cultivate loving-kindness and

compassion but also strive to achieve the great loving-kindness and great compassion exemplified by Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva. Everyone possesses some degree of loving-kindness and compassion, which is why we often take the practice of compassion lightly, thinking it is neither challenging nor as attractive as meditation practices. In fact, the cultivation of compassion is not easy, and the real challenge lies in its “greatness.” How great must it be? It must extend to all sentient beings without exception—there is no being who is not embraced by the bodhisattva’s compassion. As long as there remains even one sentient being you are unwilling to help, your compassion has not yet reached perfection.

Of course, this does not mean that bodhisattvas can save all sentient beings from suffering. Because helping sentient beings requires the right causes and conditions. Even if bodhisattvas are committed to benefiting others, the other party may not be willing, or other essential conditions may not be available. Therefore, the key lies in whether we can cultivate compassion for all sentient beings. This is a subjective factor and also a standard for evaluating our spiritual practice. Another expression of great loving-kindness and

great compassion is “unconditional great loving-kindness and compassion of shared unity.” “Unconditional” means treating all sentient beings equally, without distinctions of closeness or distance. “Shared unity” means seeing all sentient beings and oneself as one, with no separation between self and others.

Such compassion arises from the wisdom of emptiness. The bodhisattvas, understanding that all phenomena are illusory and transient, and that there is no “self” or “mine,” are able to cultivate a vast, pure, and untainted compassion for all beings. Only with this understanding can we deeply feel the oneness of ourselves and others, and thus give our utmost effort to help others, but without attachment to the concepts of “self” or “beings.” The *Diamond Sutra* teaches that bodhisattvas vow to liberate all sentient beings, whether born from womb, egg, moisture, or transformation; whether they have form or no form, have thought or no thought, or neither thought nor non-thought—all are beings whom the bodhisattvas seek to liberate. Yet within the bodhisattva’s mind, there is truly no being that is liberated. This means that while the bodhisattvas seek to liberate innumerable

beings, they remain unattached to the form of “beings.” Without such realization, we can easily be swayed by worldly phenomena.

Therefore, benefiting sentient beings requires two essential points. On one hand, we must cultivate a pure aspiration—not acting for fame, recognition, or any other personal goal, but purely for the purpose of helping others. On the other hand, we must possess wisdom—although we help sentient beings wholeheartedly, the mind remains detached, free from the forms of self, the one being helped, and the act of helping itself. Only by achieving this level of understanding can we practice complete Bodhisattva conduct, which has no negative consequences. Otherwise, even though we may be engaging in altruistic deeds, we might find ourselves distressed, struggling, and unable to sustain our efforts. This is precisely the fundamental difference between the Bodhisattva conduct and worldly charity.

Therefore, a Buddhist practitioner should understand the illusory nature of all conditioned phenomena and maintain a transcendent mind, while also having boundless compassion for all beings and actively engaging in the world to help others.

Without a transcendent state of mind, when we engage with the world, we are easily tainted by the Five Desires and Six Dusts, becoming entangled in attachment and unable to free ourselves. Without a mind of engagement in the world, we cannot practice the compassion of the Bodhisattva Path or embody the true spirit of Mahayana Buddhism.

VII

TO LOVE OR NOT TO LOVE

Buddhism refers to humans as “sentient beings,” meaning that we are living creatures with consciousness and emotions. All animals fall under this category. Emotion is one of the most fundamental aspects of the human mind, and has remained an enduring theme throughout the history of art. From literature to music, painting, and sculpture, people have used countless forms to express emotions. Even monumental buildings are imbued with such function. Across all times and cultures, even when languages differ and backgrounds vary, we can still appreciate works of art and feel a deep sense of resonance and inspiration. This is because the emotions they contain are universal, shared beyond the limits of time and space.

1. What Is Love

Ancient Chinese valued “cognition,” “emotion,” and “intention.” Cognition refers to thought and understanding; emotion to feelings and affections; and intention to volition and determination. In modern society, a person’s success is often associated with their intelligence quotient (IQ) and willpower. However, it soon became evident that emotional intelligence (EQ) plays a more significant role. Some individuals may possess high IQ and strong will, yet struggle in interpersonal relationships. This lack of EQ can create many obstacles in their career and personal development. EQ is the ability to understand and manage emotions. Those who possess this skill are able to interact with others in a harmonious way, bringing warmth and joy to those around them.

Regarding emotion, we often speak of the “seven emotions and six desires” in China. The seven emotions refer to the primary emotional states of joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hatred, and desire. On this matter, Confucianism, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and Buddhism are largely similar. The six desires arise from the six sense faculties—the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—and represent the

physical and mental cravings connected with them. These also belong to the broader sense of emotion. Emotion is not only an important part of our life—bringing both delight and sorrow—but also plays a crucial role in the cycle of birth and death. As the saying goes: “Without deep emotion, one would not be born into this Saha World; without deep attachment, one would not fall into the cycle of rebirth.”

Moreover, emotions differ according to their object. The first type is our affection for material possessions and living environments. We often develop emotional attachments to the things we own or the places we live—not only to the objects themselves, but also to the feelings they evoke. This emotional tendency has two aspects: the desire for the new and the attachment to the old. The pursuit of novelty is self-evident, for it is instinctive for most people. Yet many are drawn to what is old. That is why people love collecting antique objects, and why the feelings tied to one’s hometown have been recorded and cherished in countless ways since ancient times.

The second type of emotion arises in human relationships, including familial love, friendship, and romantic love.

Familial love is rooted in blood ties; it forms naturally as one enters the world and is often the most stable and enduring of all emotions—a reality captured in the saying that family bonds run deep. Friendship refers to the emotional bond between companions. It can be the innocent camaraderie of childhood friends, the connection between those who share common ideals, the deep and unexpected friendship across generations, or the rare meeting of spirits in perfect harmony—like the ancient tale of the musician who found his true confidant in one who understood his tune. As for romantic love, it is often the most intense and yet the most changeable of all emotions. It has been a central theme in literature, art, and film across cultures and eras, and remains one important experience in human life.

Emotion forms the very fabric of worldly life. In establishing various emotions, people also develop deep attachments, leading to countless entanglements of joy and sorrow, union and separation, love and hatred.

2. How Does Buddhism View Love

From the Buddhist perspective, emotional attachment has

several defining characteristics.

The first is delusion, a form of ignorance or the inability to see things clearly. The expression “infatuated affection” captures this well, for delusion leaves no room for reason. As the saying goes, “Love arises from no clear source, yet once it takes hold, it runs deep.” Throughout history, countless men and women have suffered immensely—some even to the point of ruin—all for the sake of love. Such emotions are built upon the deluded mind. Without wisdom, it is difficult to see the truth behind these feelings. And if one is unwilling to awaken, even the guidance of others is hard to accept.

The second is greed, marked by attachment. Whether it is toward romantic partners, family members, or friends, loving someone naturally creates a need to be loved in return. When you say “I love you,” you are, in effect, also saying, “You must love me too.” The more emotions you invest, the higher the needs and expectations that arise. This is true in romantic relationships as well as in the bond between parents and their children. Love becomes a form of bondage because attachment acts like glue and binds people together.

As we continuously invest emotions into relationships, our attachment grows, and so does our need for love. When you hold a measure of love for someone, the mind generates a measure of need. With ten measures of love, it generates ten measures of need; with a hundred measures of love, it generates a hundred measures of need. These needs must be met through the other person's response in order to feel fulfilled and balanced. However, the more intense the need becomes, the less likely it is to be reciprocated in equal measure. When there is a growing gap between what is given and what is received, suffering naturally follows.

The third is self-attachment, a sense of possession that arises from the self. This is especially evident in parental love for children and romantic love between partners, where affection can easily give rise to possessiveness and a desire to control. Such control is a major threat to the health of relationships and a direct cause of suffering. Attempts to control others can provoke resistance and rebellion, leading to conflict. Furthermore, the fear of losing someone can generate various negative emotions, including anxiety, fear, and delusive thoughts. When such relationships change, feelings of

betrayal can easily trigger anger. Such tragedies in which love turns into hatred have already occurred far too often in this world.

When the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, he realized that the continuation of life is governed by the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination. Among these, the most significant forces are ignorance and craving-clinging. Ignorance is the root of *samsara*, leading to a series of problems that follow. But what roles do craving and clinging play? Sentient beings enter this world and engage with their surroundings through six sense faculties—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. When these six senses come into contact with their six objects—form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental phenomena—we experience various feelings. If we do not maintain mindfulness at this stage, we are likely to fall into our habitual patterns, clinging to pleasant experiences and reacting with aversion to unpleasant ones. In reality, the six sense objects are merely external conditions. The effect they have on us depends entirely on the state of our mind. If we remain unattached to external objects, they will not affect us.

The reason sentient beings are bound in samsara and unable to liberate themselves is precisely due to craving and clinging. Emotion, in a sense, is like a rope; whatever we care about becomes what binds us. The Dharma teaches us that sentient beings are “bound by ignorance, entangled in the bonds of craving, and circulate in the long night of samsara, not knowing the true nature of suffering.” Overall, human emotion and love are characterized by ignorance, greed, and self-attachment. However, not all emotions are negative; otherwise, we would be no different from inanimate objects, unable to engage in spiritual cultivation. The great compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas represents a higher form of emotion, transcending the defiled, limited, and attached emotions and reaching a state of equality, infinity, and purity. Therefore, the key lies in using wisdom to see the true nature of emotion—freeing it from ignorance, greed, and self-attachment—and learning to manage and elevate it.

3. Studying Buddhism Cultivates Great Love for All Beings

1) Does Studying Buddhism Mean Not Loving Others

Renouncing worldly life requires one to let go of possessive

attachments to worldly emotions—whether familial love, romantic affection, or attachment to material things. From the perspective of ordinary beings, this may appear to be emotionless. But we must understand: Why does renunciation need to let go of these attachments? As mentioned earlier, worldly emotions are rooted in ignorance, greed, and self-attachment. They are the causes of *samsara* and the source of endless suffering. Letting go of such emotions does not mean becoming indifferent or emotionally numb like a piece of wood. Rather, it is about cultivating a form of pure, untainted emotion.

Within the monastic community, do monks have emotional connections with one another? Do Buddhist practitioners have feelings toward the Three Jewels? Of course they do. This is known as Dharma-based affection—a type of emotion founded on faith and reverence, and free from attachment or defilement. Monastics should cultivate pure and untainted emotions not only toward the Three Jewels, their teachers, and fellow practitioners, and should also develop compassion for all sentient beings. Such feelings must be grounded in wisdom and the understanding of no-self, rather than in ignorance, greed, and self-attachment. These

two forms of emotion are fundamentally different.

To cultivate undefiled emotions, we must first let go of those that are defiled. Consider the emotions we hold in this world—are they not exhausting to sustain? Especially in today's society, we lack moral restraint within, while the external world is filled with countless temptations. Our emotions are facing an unprecedented test. Without a sufficient level of mutual trust, suspicion easily gives rise to conflicts, disputes, and even crime. When the strain of such emotions accumulates beyond a certain point, we naturally begin to long for emotions that are free from defilement.

Emotions are also subject to the principle of dependent origination. The key lies in how we perceive and interact with others. In studying and practicing the Dharma, we use Buddhist wisdom to adjust our understanding and transform our mindset. In doing so, we gradually foster untainted emotions and reduce tainted ones. When wholesome conditions come together, even a worldly partner can become a companion on the path to awakening—a Bodhi partner, creating a pure and harmonious Buddhist family.

2) Loving Others Is the Buddha's Mind

There is a saying, "Great compassion is the mind of the buddha." This great compassion is not the sentimental or excessive kind commonly spoken of. It refers to a boundless love for all sentient beings, an all-encompassing, pure, and infinite love. In this world, how many people can we love? Perhaps a few in our family or a small group? If we can extend our love to all the people of a city or even a country, that is already remarkable. But to give rise to bodhicitta is to vow to benefit all sentient beings and to help them free from suffering and attain true happiness. This includes all humanity, all animals, and even celestial beings and those in the hell realms. Such noble altruistic aspiration arises from boundless love for all sentient beings.

Furthermore, we must carry this great love into practice endlessly, throughout all future time. In the *Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*, each great vow concludes with the following lines: "As long as space endures, as long as beings remain, as long as their karma and afflictions persist, my aspiration too shall have no end. From moment to moment, it continues without interruption, and in the

actions of body, speech, and mind, there is no weariness or fatigue.” These words are the solemn promise of buddhas and bodhisattvas to all sentient beings. Compared with this, what weight do worldly vows of everlasting love truly carry?

It is thus clear that Buddhist practitioners are by no means emotionless; rather, they embody great compassion and universal love. From the Buddhist perspective, all sentient beings are our relatives in the endless cycle of rebirth. As the teachings say: “Every man has been my father, and every woman my mother; throughout countless lifetimes, I have received birth through them all.” Since all beings have been our fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters, what reason do we have not to love them and hold them in compassion? And what reason do we have not to help them free from suffering and attain happiness?

The buddhas and bodhisattvas are the paragons of this great love. It is a love rooted in wisdom, free from ignorance and self-attachment. It is a love that is pure, untouched by defilement or possessiveness. It is a love that is impartial, without preference, bias, or discrimination. It is a love that is boundless, like sunlight that shines on all things, like

the earth that supports all beings—no sentient being is ever left out.

VIII

ADAPTING TO CONDITIONS OR STRIVING FOR PROGRESS

A popular internet term called “Buddha-like” has recently emerged. It refers to a laid-back and indifferent attitude toward life, often expressed as “whatever is fine” or “nothing really matters,” and has given rise to phrases such as Buddha-like youth, Buddha-like parents, and Buddha-like lifestyles. Although this trend is mostly playful and not directed at Buddhism, it spreads quickly across the internet. As a result, it has become one of the most common contemporary misunderstandings of Buddhist teachings. This misunderstanding may be related to the Buddhist idea of “adapting to conditions,” which some people take to mean a passive attitude of letting things drift. Yet in Buddhism, this is not

its true meaning.

1. Studying Buddhism Begins with Understanding Causes and Conditions

The “conditions” in the phrase “adapting to conditions” come from the Buddhist concept of causes and conditions. The fundamental principle of Buddhism is the law of cause and effect—namely, “All phenomena arise due to causes and conditions, and all phenomena perish due to causes and conditions.” In this context, “cause” refers to the primary internal factor, while “condition” refers to the external supporting factors. To produce a result, a cause must be activated by the right conditions. If the essential conditions are not available, the cause will not give rise to a result—at least for the time being. It is like a seed: without supporting conditions such as soil and water, it cannot sprout or bear fruit.

Buddhism does not endorse the idea of randomness, as it does not regard phenomena as arising merely by chance. Nor is it fatalism, which holds that everything is predetermined by past lives. It is also not theistic creationism, which believes that all things are created and governed by a divine

being. Instead, Buddhism is founded on the principle of dependent origination, which teaches: “When this exists, that comes to be; when this arises, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; when this ceases, that ceases.” This means that all phenomena are mere false appearances arising from conditions and relationships, each influencing the other.

The Avatamsaka School of Chinese Buddhism takes the idea of dependent origination to its highest level, teaching that “one is all.” This means that every single point in the universe is related to the whole universe, containing all the essence of the universe. Modern scientific ideas such as the holographic paradigm and the butterfly effect likewise suggest that the universe is an integrated whole in which everything is interconnected. Within this vast web lie endless chains of causes and conditions—some wholesome and pure, others tainted and unwholesome.

The world we perceive is shaped by our cognitive capacity, along with our feelings, experiences, and needs. Therefore, our perception is not objective but influenced by various factors. To address the limitations of individual perspective,

modern society has developed tools such as the “Six Thinking Hats” method, a type of thinking training. The goal is to draw upon the collective wisdom of many minds and examine the issues from different angles. Since personal experience is often limited in perspective, it is helpful for everyone to contribute different ways of thinking. When these perspectives are brought together, we gain a more comprehensive and objective understanding of the matter and its related conditions.

2. Adapting to Conditions and Striving for Progress

1) What Is “Adapting to Conditions”

So, what problems does “adapting to conditions” solve? I often write the phrase “adapt to conditions, embody no-self,” or sometimes in reversed, “embody no-self, adapt to conditions.” This shows that adapting to conditions is not the same as going with the ego, nor is it about being careless, indifferent, or simply doing whatever one feels like. The premise of adapting to conditions is to step beyond self-centered perception, to see all kinds of causes and conditions with a rational and open mind, and then make wise

choices. It is active, not passive, definite, not ambiguous. It does not mean blindly following whatever condition arises, or doing whatever others ask of you without discernment.

Some may ask: Doesn't Buddhism teach that we should "adapt to the needs of sentient beings"? We must understand that this does not mean we yield to others in every way. If someone intends to commit an unwholesome karma, should we become their accomplice? In Buddhism, to "adapt to the needs of sentient beings" means first seeing clearly the causes and conditions, and then understanding what kind of guidance is most appropriate for each person at that moment. From this perspective, we first bring joy to others, and then skillfully guide them in a positive direction. Ultimately, the goal is always to benefit sentient beings. In contrast, worldly forms of blind compliance—such as parents spoiling their children by giving them everything they ask for—often do more harm than good.

The wisdom of adapting to conditions is extremely important. Whether in worldly matters or transcendent pursuits, nothing can be accomplished without a clear and accurate understanding of causes and conditions. Only by carefully

observing and evaluating the objective conditions can we make the right choices.

2) Adapting to Conditions and Striving for Progress

People often assume that striving for success represents effort, while adapting to conditions implies passivity or inaction. This is a misunderstanding of what “adapting to conditions” truly means. In reality, it is through adapting to conditions that we can advance more effectively. Without the wisdom of dependent origination—without seeing things in a comprehensive and objective way, our efforts are often in vain. We often hear people complain, “I have already worked so hard. Why am I still not successful?” Such frustration often stems from a lack of wisdom in adapting to conditions. On one hand, do we strive toward the right direction? If we try to reach the south while heading toward the north, no amount of effort will get us to our goal. On the other hand, personal effort is only one part of the entire web of causes and conditions. True success requires the coming together of many supporting conditions—some of which may be outside our awareness or beyond our control. Once we realize this, we can avoid unnecessary afflictions when we

have done our best.

From a Buddhist perspective, what people commonly refer to as “assessing the right time and situation” is precisely the precondition for adapting to conditions. It means that when we undertake something, we should make an objective evaluation and adopt appropriate methods. Only then can our effort become truly effective, allowing us to achieve greater results with less exertion. Conversely, if we lack a clear understanding of the situation or fail to use skillful means, we may expend great effort yet gain little in return. Thus, adapting to conditions and striving for progress are mutually facilitating.

Think about it: Isn't this kind of wisdom needed for anything we do in life? We should first clarify our goals, then follow the causes and conditions of the present moment, and adopt methods appropriate to them. Actually, this is the same for spiritual practice. We know that the Buddha taught the Three Vehicles and 84,000 Dharma Gates, each suited to the varying capacities of sentient beings. These teachings are also manifestations of adapting to conditions. In accordance with diverse causes and conditions of all beings, he provided the teachings most suitable for them.

3. The Meaning of Adapting to Conditions in Practice and Life

Buddhism originated in India, a land where religion and philosophy were highly developed. Among the many spiritual teachers and religious traditions of the time, why was it that only the Buddha discovered the path of awakening and the method to end suffering? The key lies in this: the Buddha identified the true cause of *samsara*.

Human life is filled with all kinds of suffering. We can say that the entire span of human civilization—over five thousand years—has been an ongoing effort to find ways to alleviate suffering. From primitive agriculture in ancient times to today's era of artificial intelligence, material conditions have improved dramatically. We now enjoy comforts and conveniences that people in the past could scarcely imagine. And yet, our suffering and affliction have not diminished—in some ways, they may have even increased. We no longer suffer from hunger or cold, yet is the hollowness of the mind not a kind of hunger? Doesn't the indifference among people chill our hearts?

To resolve our suffering, we must identify its true causes from the perspective of wisdom. According to Buddhism, the root cause of all suffering comes from the internal states of greed, anger, and ignorance. They give rise to negative mindsets like jealousy, anxiety, loneliness, and insecurity. However, our efforts made over the past five thousand years of civilization have mainly focused on improving external conditions and material circumstances. This approach has only led to an increasing demand without addressing the underlying issues. It is like being seriously ill and only putting numbing medicine on the wound or covering it with decoration: apart from brief comfort or self-deception, can it really cure the disease?

The reason Buddhism can eliminate suffering is that the Buddha identified the root causes of suffering—our inner delusion and afflictions. These are the fundamental sources of human suffering and even the cause of all the world's disasters. If we fail to recognize and address the true causes of our suffering at their root, our other efforts will only provide temporary relief. For instance, when we feel lonely, we might seek companionship or watch television. However, these

actions only distract us from the immediate pain. The underlying cause of loneliness, however, remains untouched. As long as this cause remains, no amount of temporary relief will be enough. That relief loses its effectiveness over time, much like antibiotics leading to resistant bacteria. The same remedy will quickly lose its effectiveness, requiring larger doses or newer approaches. Yet, as long as those harmful mental patterns exist within us, they are always poised to create further distress and suffering, and perpetuate samsara.

Beneath the Bodhi tree, Shakyamuni Buddha, through contemplating the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, uncovered the true causes of suffering and the source of sentient beings' samsara. At the same time, he realized that every sentient being has the potential for enlightenment, capable of fundamentally resolving delusion and afflictions. After his enlightenment, the Buddha spent forty-five years teaching sentient beings the methods to alleviate suffering. These teachings include the practices of listening, contemplating, and practicing; the precepts, concentration, and wisdom; the Noble Eightfold Path; the Four Noble Truths; and the Great Bodhisattva Path of the Mahayana that affirms

all sentient beings can become buddhas. This is the wisdom of dependent origination. This revelation provides hope and salvation for all lives.

Whether in worldly endeavors or transcendent realization, true accomplishment requires a clear understanding of dependent origination, followed by diligent and skillful effort in accordance with conditions. Therefore, following conditions and striving forward are not contradictory. To study the Buddha's teachings is to learn and apply the wisdom of dependent origination. By doing so, we transcend subjective misunderstandings, let go of self-attachment, and view all phenomena from a higher perspective. In daily life, this wisdom enables us to handle various matters—whether in work, family, or relationships—with greater skillfulness and compassion. When unfavorable conditions arise, we accept them calmly, knowing that everything has its causes from the past. When favorable conditions appear, we seize them wisely, recognizing that opportunities come to those who are prepared. In our spiritual practice, we learn to contemplate life and the world through the lens of dependent origination. When we truly understand dependent origination, we

can realize emptiness and the true nature of all phenomena.
This is the path to awakening and liberation in life.

IX

CONCLUSION

This lecture has explored the “Life Attitudes of Buddhists” from eight perspectives. On one hand, it seeks to dispel common misunderstandings about Buddhism; on the other, it aims to help people establish a correct understanding of the Buddha’s teachings and benefit from them. The Dharma is a profound wisdom for life. It is not abstract philosophy or empty theory, but the direct realization of the Buddha, and a truth that has been embodied and upheld by generations of great masters and practitioners. Today, this ancient wisdom has spread across the world, transforming the lives of countless people. When our views begin to change, we understand what to choose and what to let go of, how to see the world and how to see life; thereby, our mindset naturally

transforms. Over time, mindset forms character, and character shapes the quality of our being. May everyone take the “Life Attitudes of Buddhists” as a mirror for their own worldview, values, and way of living, and practice it in daily life. In doing so, it will bring you lasting benefit.



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