



FAITH AND LIFE

Master Jiqun

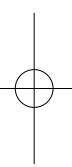
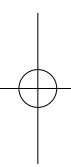
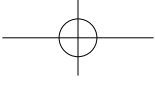
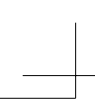
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Life is a journey of learning, growing, and continuously overcoming challenges. From childhood to adulthood, everything we learn ultimately helps us address the problems we face. Even when we learn out of interest, it's often to fulfill an inner need. Each challenge we work through leaves a mark on our path, guiding us toward different futures.

The saying “Learn as long as you live” reminds us that learning is a lifelong journey, because life constantly presents new challenges—unless you remain stagnant and stop improving yourself. In fact, once you stop

learning, life loses its vitality. Since the 1960s, organizations like UNESCO have strongly advocated for lifelong learning and education, which have gained worldwide recognition.

What exactly should we learn? This depends on the problems we want to solve. We all face many problems in life, which can be divided into practical and permanent problems. Practical problems include basic survival, as well as family, relationships, career, status, and interpersonal relations—issues everyone must face. But these are not all that life is about. As the most self-aware beings, we differ from other animals in our ability to reflect on the deeper truths of life: Who am I? Where did I come from, and where will I go after death? What do I live for? These permanent problems remain unanswered, even as technology advances.

We once believed that science would explain everything and eventually replace religion. Yet, even today, when we can explore outer space and make groundbreaking

discoveries, our understanding of ourselves remains unclear. We are still helpless in the face of our inner afflictions and uncertain about the true purpose of life. This is why understanding religion remains essential. It guides us toward a path of inner reflection—through calming the mind, we find peace and purpose in our life; through cultivating the mind, we realize its true nature.

Since primitive times, religious faith has always accompanied the development of human society. The faiths that have been passed down to the present day include Buddhism, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam, Taoism, and various forms of folk faith. Statistics show that about eighty percent of the world's population—now over seven billion—follow a religion. Its influence on people is far-reaching, shaping their outlook on life, values, worldview, and their way of interacting with others.

Next, I will focus on exploring the relationship between faith and life, from a Buddhist perspective.

I

FAITH CAN ESTABLISH MORAL PRINCIPLES

When it comes to religious faith, it is inseparable from morality. Religion has long served as the cornerstone upon which different peoples have built their moral standards. Some may think religion is metaphysical and not essential to daily life. But do they still need morality? Do they all want to live in a harmonious, stable environment built on mutual trust? In any society, when morality is ignored and standards of conduct are lacking, people eventually feel unsafe. This is precisely the challenge we face today. Why does negative news keep emerging one after another? Why are there so many troubling social

trends that leave people feeling disheartened or even fearful? At the root of these issues are a lack of morality and a limited understanding of what morality truly means.

Traditional Chinese society was rooted in a Confucian, clan-based system. In this context, morality served as the code of conduct that maintained all relationships among individuals, families, and society. As a result, morality was often regarded as a social obligation rather than a personal need.

What is the outcome of this mindset? It leads us to follow moral norms only when others do, so morality is considered more of a social obligation than a personal choice. When others abandon morality, we feel no need to uphold it either. We may even think that being moral means we will be taken advantage of. We can easily recognize the value of tangible things, such as wealth, houses, and cars, yet fail to see the deeper value of morality. As a result, we are willing to talk about morality when there is no conflict of interest. Yet, when faced with a choice between

morality and personal gain, we quickly cast morality aside. The problem is: If everyone gives up morality for the sake of self-interest, what is left for us to believe in?

How can we rebuild morality so that it becomes people's first choice, rather than just an empty slogan? The key lies in recognizing its true value. Only with a clear understanding can we consciously practice it in our daily lives. When discussing its value, we must first understand its ideological foundation.

1. Rooted in Worldly Philosophy

From the perspective of worldly philosophy, morality is related to noble ideals. Only with positive life aspirations can one adhere to corresponding moral principles. In Confucianism, the “virtuous gentleman” represents a standard of moral excellence. At the most basic level, this involves practicing the five virtues: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity, as well as cultivating qualities such as self-reflection, self-restraint,

ethical self-cultivation, and tolerance towards others.

For thousands of years, the “virtuous gentleman” has been praised as a model of morality and self-fulfillment. This ideal is reflected in classical teachings such as: “A man of virtue knows what is right,” “A man of virtue is calm and poised,” and “A man of virtue helps others achieve their best.” Moreover, Confucianism upholds the three immortal pursuits of life: establishing virtue, achieving success, and leaving a lasting legacy through words. Among them, “establishing virtue” is regarded as the highest, surpassing both literary and military achievements, as well as worldly fame.

In such a cultural context, people aspire to embody the virtues of a gentleman and naturally follow moral principles, as this is the path to becoming a gentleman. It also brings the benefits of learning from the virtuous and gaining social recognition. However, without this cultural context, morality becomes hollow. At one point, sarcastic remarks like “How much does morality weigh?”

became widespread. This happened because in people's minds, wealth had become the most urgent, the most important, and even the overriding goal, while morality was no longer being nourished. Moreover, driven by desire, all kinds of immoral behaviors spread unchecked.

To change this situation, the value system must be rebuilt. When virtuous gentlemen are truly respected, people will begin to shift their goals. This approach focuses on using results to guide behavior. Just as people began placing greater emphasis on academic credentials, exams like the college entrance exam, high school entrance exam, and even primary school admissions became major points of public concern. But in today's money-centric culture, merely promoting morality through ideological guidance seems increasingly challenging.

2. Rooted in Faith in God

In addition to philosophy, morality also stems from faith in God. For example, in Christian countries, morality

is founded on faith in God, while in Islamic countries, it is based on faith in Allah. Since the founding of the United States, during the inauguration ceremonies, both the President and the Chief Justice have been required to take an oath with their hand on the Bible. This ceremony, which carries religious, moral, and legal significance, clearly illustrates the close connection between religion and morality.

Many people believe in an omnipotent God who governs the universe and determines both present happiness and future destiny. In this view, only by having faith in God, following His will, and adhering to moral standards, can they enter heaven after death. Otherwise, they will fall into hell and be punished by eternal flames. This view binds faith, morality, and human happiness: to attain happiness in this life or everlasting happiness after death, they must believe in God and observe moral standards.

This kind of morality is backed by a powerful belief system, but that is also where its limitations lie. If one

does not believe in an omnipotent God, the morality based on this belief will lose its effect; if one is skeptical, the power of morality will also be diminished. Therefore, as God's authority is continuously challenged, even in traditional Christian countries, the moral influence once upheld by belief in God is declining.

3. Rooted in Human Nature and the Law of Cause and Effect

Unlike monotheism, Buddhism does not believe in an omnipotent God governing the universe. Instead, its moral framework is built upon the laws of life as revealed by the Buddha—namely, the understanding of human nature and the law of cause and effect. This reflects the Buddhist view of human beings and the world.

The first concept is human nature, which explains why we should follow moral principles based on an understanding of ourselves. Everyone aspires to become a better person—wise, happy, and at peace. But how can

we improve ourselves? Buddhism teaches that our existence is a temporary combination of the five aggregates, which include countless thoughts and emotions. Our views shape our mindset, which in turn shapes our character and the quality of our lives.

Wholesome mental states and moral behavior shape a healthy character and a noble quality of life, while unwholesome mental states and immoral actions lead to their opposites. Mental states and character are not determined by the buddhas and bodhisattvas; rather, they follow objective laws, which I often refer to as the “causality of the mind.” This law can lead to two effects: immediate effects, which can be perceived in the present, and long-term effects, which continually shape future lives. In short, moral behavior brings both immediate and long-term benefits, while immoral behavior brings the opposite.

Once we realize that good actions bring us positive growth, while evil actions leave negative imprints in

our lives, we will naturally follow moral behavior out of responsibility for ourselves. This isn't about impressing others, succumbing to social pressure, or fearing punishment from an external force. It's about becoming a better version of ourselves. In today's world, people prioritize physical health, focusing only on their bodies. But they fail to realize that the key lies in cultivating the mind. In fact, following moral principles is the true form of self-care. This is nurturing life from the inside out, a form of well-being that spans from the present life to endless future lifetimes.

Therefore, Buddhism establishes the value of morality based on human nature and the law of cause and effect. This moral framework does not rely on external authority but can be tested through personal practice, making it more universal and easily accepted by the public. It benefits not only individual growth but also social harmony. For example, the Five Precepts and the Ten Wholesome Deeds advocated by Buddhism bring immense benefits to both oneself and others. When more people follow moral

actions, such as abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive and harsh speech, as well as greed, aversion, and ignorance, the society becomes more stable.

By following moral principles and witnessing their positive effects on ourselves and society, we naturally feel encouraged and motivated to continue. This inner strength is beyond what material possessions can provide. Therefore, within the Buddhist moral framework, individual and social values enhance each other. If we only focus on the social value of morality while neglecting the individual value, it becomes difficult for us to maintain persistent and self-motivated practice. On the other hand, if morality is confined to personal discipline without considering its broader societal impact, it makes a limited impact and lacks universal significance.

II

FAITH CAN GUIDE SPIRITUAL PURSUITS

Modern people are accustomed to material pursuits—houses, cars, clothes and food—so “shop, shop, and shop some more” has become a daily norm. The widespread use of online shopping has freed people from constraints, allowing them to shop online anytime. While meeting daily needs, it can also dispel feelings of emptiness and relieve stress. As a result, the pursuit of material goods is increasing exponentially. However, when it comes to spiritual pursuits, many people find it unfamiliar, abstract, or even outdated.

So, can material wealth solve all our problems? In fact, many people today are becoming increasingly lost rather than content. In the past, during times of poverty, we believed that having money would bring happiness. Now, many have money, houses, cars, and everything they once wished for—but why are they still unhappy? The root of the problem lies in the lack of a healthy mindset.

In fact, happiness is experienced through the mind. When we are filled with mental illness or unhealthy mental states, such as anxiety, fear, and insecurity, we become incapable of experiencing happiness. Just as physical illness harms health, mental illness destroys happiness and becomes the greatest enemy to happiness.

In recent years, the government has been actively promoting both material and spiritual development. As material conditions improve, mental issues are increasingly emerging, reaching a level that cannot be ignored. So, how can we build a spiritual civilization? It starts with healthy spiritual pursuits, including exploring life's permanent

problems, perfecting one's character, and engaging with culture and art—all of which are inseparable from faith.

1. The Exploration of Permanent Problems

First, it is about contemplating permanent problems: Who am I? What is destiny? What am I living for? Where did I come from, and where do I go after death? What is the true nature of the world? These are the very questions philosophy and religion strive to answer. Some may ask, “Why think about these? What do they mean to my life?” Actually, this allows us to reflect on life from a higher perspective. In the vast universe, amidst the endless stream of time, this short life is but a fleeting instant—how can we make it meaningful? Without this higher perspective, we cannot truly see the meaning of life, simply drifting aimlessly due to the force of karma.

Where do we find the answer? Science primarily interprets material phenomena, while philosophy and religion explore the essence of the world, each with its own

approach. Philosophy understands the world through rationality—relying on reasoning and speculation rather than direct realization—which cannot directly grasp the essence. Since ancient Greece, philosophers have consistently challenged and overturned previous theories, and to this day, no consensus has been reached. Theistic religions, on the other hand, attribute all ultimate answers to the creator, which, for non-believers, is “agnosticism.”

However, Buddhism teaches us that, to address these permanent problems, we must awaken the wisdom inherent in life and look inward rather than outward. This is the very truth the Buddha directly realized upon attaining enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. To study Buddhism is to pursue the truth and the path to awakening as our mission—by following the guidance of the Dharma, just as the Buddha did. With such a spiritual aspiration, we can live with a clear purpose rather than wasting our lives in confusion.

2. The Pursuit of Perfecting Character

Next, we must cultivate a healthy mindset, character, and quality of life. When it comes to perfecting character, understanding the nature of the mind is crucial. Throughout both Eastern and Western philosophy, there has long been debate over whether human nature is inherently good or evil. Confucianism teaches that “Everyone has the potential to become as virtuous and wise as Yao or Shun.” It also emphasizes that “The slight difference between humans and animals lies in our innate moral potential.” To become a sage, one must first cultivate oneself—developing sincerity and a virtuous mind—further extending this to managing the family, governing the country, and ultimately bringing peace to the world.

Buddhism believes that sentient beings have dual natures: a Buddha-nature with the potential for awakening and a demonic nature afflicted by the three poisons of greed, aversion, and ignorance. Whether we realize our

Buddha-nature or fall into demonic nature depends on how we understand human nature and what we choose to cultivate. Before realizing our Buddha-nature, we are often dominated by our demonic nature, which manifests as unhealthy mindsets, such as greed, hatred, jealousy, and selfishness. They continuously create suffering, keeping us trapped in the cycle of birth and death. However, the Buddha realized that all beings possess the wisdom and virtues of the Tathagata, along with the ability to save themselves. This realization fills life with hope and is the greatest gift the Buddha offers to humanity.

If we wish to attain the qualities of the buddhas or bodhisattvas, we must practice to free ourselves from our demonic nature, perfect our character, and ultimately develop concentration and wisdom. In other words, “Pay reverence only to the Buddha, for he embodies the perfection of character.”

3. The Pursuit of Culture and Art

Thirdly, the pursuit of culture and art represents a part of spiritual life and is closely connected to our faith. In Western art history, many famous works are directly inspired by Catholic and Christian doctrines. A large number of murals and sculptures were originally created for churches. Similarly, in traditional Chinese art, from cave sculptures to the copying of Buddhist sutras during the Tang Dynasty, these works were expressions of devotion to Buddhism. In this sense, they served religious purposes as offerings of faith and were later recognized as artworks.

Chinese painting, calligraphy and poetry emphasize *yijing*; it refers to a realm of thought, inseparable from Buddhist teachings. While Confucian culture emphasizes worldly engagement, it lacks the supramundane detachment and freedom that Buddhism offers. As a result, many ancient literati enjoyed reciting Buddhist sutras, such as the *Heart Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra*, the

Vimalakirti Sutra, and the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. By studying these teachings, they elevated their state of mind, which was naturally reflected in their works. This gave their works deep meaning and set them apart from the secular world. Such influence is evident in the works of great masters throughout history, such as Wang Wei, Liu Zongyuan, Su Dongpo, and Wang Anshi.

In short, various spiritual pursuits—such as exploring eternity, perfecting character, and pursuing culture and art—are inseparable from faith. Since Buddhism spread to China, it complements native Chinese culture while greatly enriching people's spiritual lives. As a result, Buddhism holds an irreplaceable and important role for Chinese people.

III

FAITH CAN CULTIVATE A TRANSCENDENT MINDSET

Many people long for a transcendent mindset and a life filled with poetry and distant dreams. This is because our attachments to relationships, careers, family, and social connections often bring us many afflictions and pressures, leaving us overwhelmed. Furthermore, we hold lasting expectations toward these attachments, unable to face their changes or even accept the suffering of losing them. As a result, the more we have, the more anxious, fearful, and insecure we become. The more we possess, the greater the chance of change: the more opportunities to lose, and the more frequent the setbacks we will face.

Today, we live in a world of rapid changes. In the past, people could live in peace and contentment in one place for decades. But in this era of globalization, events in one country can ripple across the globe, triggering a chain reaction. Moreover, the scope of our activities has greatly expanded; many of us travel by car and plane to different places every day. This has introduced more uncertainty and insecurity into our lives.

If we become overly dependent on external things, we will fear change, grow anxious about gains and losses, and end up exhausted. How can we maintain a sense of detachment and calmly face everything in this ever-changing world? It takes wisdom.

1. Accessing Situations with Dependent Origination

Confucianism emphasizes worldly achievements, such as establishing a family and career, as well as pursuing glory and wealth. With this perspective, we inevitably become dependent on family, relationships, and career. As the

saying goes, “When a person has no desires, their character naturally elevates.” As long as we have desires and reliance on external things, we will be affected by their changes, unable to attain true freedom.

Buddhism perceives life primarily through the lens of samsara and the nature of the mind, which precisely complement Confucian culture. The view of samsara reveals the length of life, showing that life is not limited to this lifetime, but spans across a beginningless past and an endless future. The nature of the mind helps us understand the depth of life, showing that life includes not only the six consciousnesses that we can perceive, but also the subconscious, which stores all our past life experiences. Therefore, we don’t have to become entangled in temporary gains and losses. We should examine life from a higher perspective, understanding that everything we have now follows the law of causes, conditions, and causality, as the gatha goes: “When conditions gather, things arise; when conditions disperse, things cease.”

All phenomena in the world, including human existence, are determined by numerous conditions; they are illusions arising from conditional relationships. When causes and conditions come together, things manifest; when they dissipate, things decay. Since everything follows the law of dependent origination, any change in a single condition will change the result. Therefore, everything is ever-changing—there's no need to fear it, much less resist it.

In fact, change brings opportunity. While good things can turn bad, bad things can also turn good. The key lies in the causes and conditions we create. In Buddhism, “adapting to conditions” means using wisdom to assess situations and make the best choice based on current causes and conditions. We then put effort into shaping the causes while accepting whatever outcome arises. Success is certainly worthy of celebration, but failure is not the end; it can serve as a new starting point, guiding us to further improve the causes.

2. Understanding Emptiness Through Dependent Origination

The law of dependent origination implies that everything lacks inherent nature; it is empty in nature. As the *Heart Sutra* goes: “Form does not differ from emptiness, and emptiness does not differ from form; form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.” “Form” refers to phenomena that exist, which are inherently empty; they are mere illusions arising from conditional relationships. Furthermore, the *Diamond Sutra* teaches: “All conditioned phenomena are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, like dew and lightning; thus should you contemplate them.” This tells us that everything that has occurred, no matter how glorious or disappointing, is like a dream. In this dream, we experience various images and the entanglements of love and hate. Once we truly see things as they are, will we still be affected by gain and loss?

Beyond recognizing the illusory nature of conditioned phenomena, we must realize emptiness through meditation

and abide in it. In this way, we can live, work, and interact with others without any attachment, just as the *Diamond Sutra* says: “One should cultivate a mind that does not dwell anywhere.” When the mind is free from attachment, it is like the vast sky; despite the passing clouds, the sky remains crystal clear; it is unmoved, undisturbed, and undefiled.

The mind inherently possesses the wisdom of non-abiding and the ability to remain unattached; it is simply obscured by ignorance. In Buddhism, “seeing the true nature of the mind” means realizing emptiness and awakening this wisdom and ability through practice. As a result, when facing various thoughts and external circumstances, we can always maintain a sense of detachment.

When we truly realize emptiness and abide in it, we can not only accept all the changes in reality, but also remain at ease even in the face of death. Many great masters were able to pass away while sitting or standing; this is not a

myth but the realization of the awakened nature, unborn and undying. For them, birth is not the beginning, and death is not the end—so what is there to fear? When we transcend the cycle of birth and death, what is there to be anxious about?

After the Han and Wei Dynasties, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism became the main pillars of Chinese culture. Although Buddhism originated outside China, its introduction over two thousand years ago has profoundly influenced China's philosophy, literature, and art. Therefore, any study of traditional Chinese culture is incomplete without Buddhism.

The Chinese are very fortunate, as we embrace Confucian thought, actively engaging in worldly affairs, while also drawing from Buddhist wisdom, which brings us a sense of transcendence. Without such a transcendent mindset, we may become attached to success and frustrated by failure, both of which can be exhausting. However, if we can engage in worldly affairs with a

transcendent mindset, we won't be attached to success or frustrated by failure. No matter how the world changes, everything can become an opportunity for practice, allowing us to accept all experiences with ease. Such perfect freedom! Therefore, no matter what profession we are in, Buddhist wisdom is greatly beneficial, as it brings us peace of mind.

IV

FAITH CAN CULTIVATE COMPASSION AND UNIVERSAL LOVE

Universal love is relative to individual love. Individual love refers to family relationships, romance, and friendship—connections people all know and pursue. They include kinship ties with parents, siblings, and spouses, as well as social ties with friends and colleagues. This form of love, built around self, undoubtedly brings great joy, but the issue lies in the notion of “self.”

People have a natural selfish nature, also known as “self-attachment” in Buddhism. When an individual excessively focuses on themselves and views everything

from a self-centred perspective, they naturally create conflict with others. As we often see in the news, even among close family members—such as parents and children or husbands and wives—disagreements over opinions or property disputes can lead to legal battles or even physical fights. It is even more common to see conflicts such as siblings turning against each other, friendships falling apart, and business partners betraying one another. When people can't live in harmony with those around them, it also brings a hostile and tense atmosphere in society as a whole.

Moreover, as the economy grows, the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. When both sides cannot view or manage wealth properly, this gap can easily create tension and foster a “hatred of the rich,” threatening social stability.

How can we tackle these issues? It is crucial to promote the education of love: teaching people how to love, and elevating the individual love into universal love and

compassion. When more people engage in public welfare, rather than relying on just a few, a culture of mutual support will be fostered throughout society. In this way, we can reduce the opposition between the rich and the poor, bringing warmth to society. To achieve this, cultural influence is indispensable.

1. Love Rooted in Self is Limited

To some extent, we are products of culture, shaped not only by school education but also by the influence of family, society, books, etc. Together, these factors shape our outlook on life, worldview, values, and lifestyle, ultimately determining who we become.

In traditional Chinese culture, Confucianism emphasizes ethics and social order. This emphasis is embodied in the “Five Relationships,” which define the proper conduct between father and son, ruler and subject, husband and wife, elder and younger siblings, and friends. They are further explained as follows: “affection between father

and son, righteousness between ruler and subject, distinct responsibilities between husband and wife, respect for the elders and care for the younger, and trust between friends.”

Furthermore, Confucianism also places a special emphasis on *ren* (benevolence). Mencius also said, “The heart of empathy is inherent in everyone,” meaning that this empathy arises from our innate goodness and extends beyond family. We can further extend this inherent empathy from caring for family and friends to the public. However, while Confucianism advocates benevolent care for others, it also acknowledges that “love has distinctions.” This means that although Confucian benevolence is extensive, it is not equal; it is allocated based on the closeness of relationships and the nature of self-interest.

Christianity promotes universal love and actively engages in charitable work to help the poor. However, while humans are the focus of this love, animals are even treated as food. Even among humans, love is often for fellow

believers, while those of other faiths may be excluded. This exclusivity inherent in monotheistic religions has sometimes sparked religious conflicts. These contradictions are all tied to the “self.”

As long as there is the “self,” we will always perceive distinctions between ourselves and others, closeness and distance, likes and dislikes, and even between different nations and ethnicities. Carrying these distinctions in our minds may give rise to duality and lead to conflict with others. That is why love rooted in the self, no matter how great, will always be limited and can never truly embrace everything.

2. Only No-self Can Lead to Compassion and Universal Love

Buddhism teaches that true compassion and universal love are both equal and unconditional. Our compassion achieves perfection only when not a single being is excluded. So, how do we achieve this? The most

important theoretical foundation is the concept of “no-self.” Without a sense of “self,” there is no division between “I” and “others,” no sense of closeness or distance, and no opposition. This is how we can fully benefit others. When we hear the term “no-self,” we should not panic—it does not mean we don’t exist; rather it means letting go of our wrong perceptions of ourselves.

This entails the guidance of wisdom to help us truly discover ourselves, while realizing that “I” and all beings in the six realms are inherently one. Without this understanding, we may wonder: “What do other beings have to do with me? Why should I care about their interests, since I’m not interested in them? How does it serve my life purpose?”

Only by understanding the wisdom of “no-self” and realizing our oneness with all beings can we naturally help others—because helping others is actually helping ourselves. It is like when our feet get hurt; our hands reach out to help without a second thought. We don’t

question, “Why should we help? We’re the hands, not the feet.” At that moment, we do not think about personal gain or loss at all.

Bodhisattvas embody the qualities of “great loving-kindness without affinity, and unconditional compassion with same unity,” because they view all other beings as one with themselves, just like the hands and feet of the same body. Whenever other beings are in need of help or facing difficulties, they give rise to compassion naturally, and offer help unconditionally, with no expectation or desire for anything in return. This compassion is limitless; there is no being that a bodhisattva would not help. This is the essence of Mahayana Bodhicitta—a noble aspiration to awaken oneself while helping all beings awaken, escape suffering, and attain happiness. Developing this aspiration is what marks a true Mahayana practitioner.

In addition to making vows, we must continually put Bodhicitta into practice, which involves loving-kindness

and compassion. Loving-kindness means bringing happiness to others, while compassion means alleviating their suffering. This practice begins by awakening our innate empathy, continues with cultivating kindness, and ultimately culminates in perfecting the Four Immeasurables: loving-kindness, compassion, rejoicing, and equanimity. It also follows a sequence: from one person, to ten, to a hundred, a thousand, and even tens of thousands; from those with whom we are connected, to those with whom we are not; from those we like, to those we dislike; from humans to all sentient beings. In both seated meditation and daily life practice, we gradually transcend self-attachment, greed and aversion, likes and dislikes, and all other limited preconceptions.

When it comes to compassion and universal love, what distinguishes Buddhism from Confucianism and other religions is its emphasis on “no-self.” As long as the sense of “self” remains, compassion will be limited; only by letting go of the “self” can boundless compassion truly arise.

V

FAITH CAN RESOLVE THE PROBLEM OF DEATH AND REBIRTH

In China, death is often seen as inauspicious and thus considered a taboo topic. We may think of death as something that happens to others, not to ourselves. We hustle through life, striving tirelessly to make money and build our careers. Even when we have more wealth than we could ever spend in a lifetime, it is still not enough—as if we could live forever and keep earning endlessly. We never reflect that death is inevitable and will eventually take everything away. But the timing of death is uncertain—it could happen next year, tomorrow, or even in the next second. If those who died suddenly had known that life

could end so abruptly, would they have pursued their goals so recklessly, without making any preparation for death? Unfortunately, many lives end unprepared, and such sudden deaths are occurring at increasingly younger ages.

When we hear about the deaths of relatives and friends, we feel a sense of panic. At the “Buddhism and Psychotherapy” forum co-hosted by Suzhou West Garden Monastery of Vinaya School and the psychology community, participants explored the topic of “death anxiety.” I delivered a lecture on behalf of the Buddhist community, explaining the Buddhist view of life and death through an interpretation of the *Heart Sutra*. Many attending psychologists remarked that Buddhism offers the most thorough solution to the issue of death.

If we never reflect on death or prepare for it, then when it arrives, we are likely to face it with pain, confusion, and helplessness. Despite the suffering and all rescue efforts, we may eventually pass away in despair. This is how

many people's lives end today—isn't it somewhat tragic and hasty? No wonder the ancients considered "a peaceful death" as one of the Five Blessings.

How can we pass away peacefully, without fear or worry? To achieve this, we must understand the truth about death and where we will go after death. Unfortunately, the education we receive today, along with the materialistic views such as "Death is like a lamp going out," and the Confucian idea that "If you do not understand life, how can you understand death?"—all fail to answer this question. So, is death really the end of everything? Do we truly not need to prepare for it? When we are young, many of us feel it is irrelevant. But when we are old, questions like "How will I die?" and "Where will I go?" begin to arise more often, stirring a sense of uncertainty and unease.

When it comes to death, exploring its truth and finding a way beyond it is not only a challenge we face today, but also the very reason the Buddha renounced his royal life.

In fact, it is the main problem Buddhist practice seeks to address. The Buddha gave up his throne and became a monk after witnessing the suffering caused by aging, sickness, and death. He realized that, in the face of death, youth, beauty, wealth, and status are all fleeting and worthless. Thus, he decided to seek the eternal value of life. After six years of ascetic practice, he finally attained awakening under the Bodhi tree, realizing the emptiness, a state of neither arising nor ceasing. So, how does Buddhism view death?

1. Death Is Not the End

When the Buddha attained enlightenment, he realized that life is not limited to this single lifetime, but flows through an endless cycle of birth and death. This life is merely a fleeting moment in the ongoing flow, like a single wave in the ocean. The birth and death we experience now is just like the rising and falling of a wave. Waves rise and fall, but the ocean remains unmoved. If we fail to see the ocean, but live only within the waves, thinking they

are everything, we will be constantly tossed by their rise and fall. However, if we perceive life and death as part of the ocean, we can realize its infinite aspect as the ocean itself, rather than being confined to the finite aspect like fleeting waves. In this way, we naturally become less anxious.

Furthermore, China's "Wukong" satellite has discovered that the material world we see accounts for only 5% of the universe. Additionally, dark matter makes up 27%, and dark energy comprises 68%. Psychologists also point out that life has two levels: the consciousness and the subconscious. Consciousness is just the tip of the iceberg, while the subconscious is the massive mountain hidden beneath the surface. This indicates that our perspective is very limited. However, studying Buddhism helps us unlock our wisdom and understand life and death from a broader view.

As ordinary beings, we are trapped in the cycle of samsara, but Buddhist teachings on nirvana, rebirth to a Pure

Land, and the Bodhisattva path point us toward the true destination of life. Many people equate nirvana with death. But in reality, nirvana is the complete cessation of delusion and afflictions—the realization of the state of neither arising nor ceasing. It includes both “Incomplete Nirvana” and “Complete Nirvana.” The former means that this physical body composed of five aggregates still exists, while the latter signifies the dissolution of both the physical body and consciousness. Therefore, nirvana is not death; it can be realized while we are still alive.

The Pure Land practice is also an important way to resolve death anxiety. It is intended for practitioners who are unable to attain enlightenment in this lifetime. Amitabha Buddha’s compassionate vow allows them to accumulate merit through “Faith, Vows, and Practice.” By wholeheartedly chanting his name and relying on his power, they can be reborn in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. That is a place of infinite peace and happiness, where Amitabha Buddha compassionately guides sentient beings. This is why Pure Land practitioners

view death not as an end, but as a rebirth—a process of complete transformation and renewal. With such a bright future ahead, we will not fear death, nor cling to anything in this life.

Moreover, bodhisattvas have attained non-abiding nirvana; this means that, driven by great compassion after enlightenment, they continue to save sentient beings trapped in samsara. Practicing the Bodhisattva path means making boundless compassionate vows, treating samsara as a battlefield, tirelessly rescuing sentient beings across all worlds, and guiding them from delusion to awakening. As stated in the *Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*: “Even if the realm of infinite space ends, the realm of sentient beings ends, the karma of sentient beings ends, and the afflictions of sentient beings end, my vows are endless, thought after thought without even an instant of ceasing. And I will never grow weary of this practice—in my actions of body, speech, and mind.”

What magnificent resolve! What great vows! With such vows, bodhisattvas can manifest in various forms to meet the needs of sentient beings—going wherever they are needed. Thus, instead of helplessly fearing death like ordinary beings, they transcend the cycle of birth and death—transforming that fear into boundless compassion!

2. Hospice Care

Hospice care offers a way for us to face death. Many philosophers say that philosophy prepares us for death, but religion plays an even more vital role in this preparation. In Buddhism, contemplating that death could come at any moment is a fundamental practice for all practitioners; it is not only a primary practice, but also a preparatory practice for all Dharma paths. True practitioners are always preparing for death. Knowing that death can strike at any moment fosters urgency and vigilance in practice.

Buddhism divides life into four stages: birth, living, death, and the intermediate state between death and the next rebirth. This intermediate stage is like finishing one job but not yet starting the next—a transitional phase between this life and the next. When a person leaves this world, how do they transition from this life to the next? What determines where life will go? One factor is past karma; the other is the final thought at the moment of death.

When wholesome thoughts arise, they can help good karma ripen more quickly; if one aspires to be reborn in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss and has accumulated sufficient merit, they can be welcomed by Amitabha Buddha at the moment of death. However, if at the moment of death, one is disturbed by afflictions, and gives rise to strong greed or anger, they will fall into lower realms. That's why Buddhism places great emphasis on hospice care—providing mental guidance to the dying before death. This helps them let go of all worldly attachments, understand their future destination, and develop

deep faith in Amitabha Buddha's compassionate vow—wishing to leave the Saha world and be reborn in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. At the same time, through chanting Amitabha Buddha's name or the Three Refuges, we assist the dying in adjusting their mental states and settling into right mindfulness. These are very important external supports in the transition of life.

Hospice care is now common in the West. It helps relieve physical pain while also providing spiritual care and support for seriously ill patients who can no longer be treated. This kind of care also includes faith-based guidance, allowing them to complete the final journey of life with peace and dignity.

VI

FAITH CAN HELP ONE REDISCOVER ONESELF

The world today is changing rapidly, and life is rich and diverse—with media, entertainment, games, tech products, and the rise of artificial intelligence and virtual worlds. As a result, we’ve become increasingly dependent on external distractions. Outside of work, many are glued to their phones, scrolling through fragmented content. So they find it hard to sit quietly with themselves, and some even lose the ability to rest. They can’t fall asleep even when exhausted, as they keep scrolling uncontrollably. In response to these issues, the latest edition of the *International Classification of Diseases (ICD)* contains “gaming

disorder,” along with clear diagnostic criteria to help psychiatrists determine whether a patient has developed a pathological addiction to gaming. In addition, modern ailments like “phone addiction” and “Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome (DSPS)” have become global issues.

Amid the overwhelming stream of information, humanity is increasingly losing touch with itself, facing more problems and experiencing deteriorating mental health. At the same time, technology has armed us with unprecedented destructive power, making the world fraught with hidden dangers that are difficult to defend against.

The fundamental solution starts with the mind. Inner peace is the foundation for world peace, and inner stability is the key to global stability. Eastern culture, especially the wisdom of Buddhism, plays a crucial role in helping us understand our inner world, reconnect with ourselves, and cultivate a healthy personality. In recent years, Buddhism’s influence has been growing in Western countries. Many psychologists are studying Buddhist

teachings and meditation practices, integrating them into academic research and clinical therapy.

Just like a product, a person must be shaped through the right methods. On one hand, this involves listening to and reflecting on Buddhist teachings—embracing the cultivation of wisdom and awakening, thereby transforming our views and resolving life’s challenges. On the other hand, it involves subduing afflictions through meditation practices such as samatha and vipassana. Guided by the right view, we can cultivate a healthy mindset and a well-rounded character, ultimately becoming the best version of ourselves—embodying the same noble qualities as the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Practicing Buddhism is not about seeking something external. The purpose of relying on the Three Jewels is to guide our inner cultivation. While we take refuge in the Three Jewels, this goes beyond external forms such as Buddha statues, Dharma, or Sangha—these are the outer Three Jewels. There are also the inner Three Jewels,

which refer to our inherent nature of awakening. By relying on wise teachers, we listen to the true Dharma and put it into practice—not to idolize buddhas, bodhisattvas, or teachers, but to ultimately realize our true nature.

We have just explored the role of faith from a Buddhist perspective through six key aspects: establishing moral principles, guiding spiritual pursuits, cultivating a transcendent mindset, cultivating compassion and universal love, resolving the problem of death and rebirth, and rediscovering oneself. I hope that, through studying this wisdom, we can eliminate evil, cultivate goodness, and embody noble character, thereby contributing to the healthy development of society.