

# **The Significance of Understanding the Self**

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What are the most important relationships in life? I believe there are three key types: interpersonal relationships, our connection with nature, and the relationship we have with ourselves. Confucianism attaches great importance to relationships among people, highlighting the five cardinal relationships—ruler to subject, father to son, elder brother to younger, husband to wife, and friend to friend. It also takes loyalty, filial piety, fraternal respect, forbearance, and kindness as principles of interaction. Western culture explores the relationship between humans and the universe, focusing on understanding nature and then conquering it. Buddhism, on the other hand, centers on understanding the self, believing that only by clearly understanding the relationship with oneself can harmonious relationships among people and with nature be achieved.

If a person cannot see themselves clearly, it is difficult to subdue their own mind. Such people naturally find it hard to accept and treat others kindly. Confucianism emphasizes human relationships, and for thousands of years, it has had a profound impact on Chinese people and society, permeating all aspects of life. However, we also observe that when these ethics are not based on an understanding of human nature and lack the constraint of public morality, interpersonal relationships can become complicated and even hypocritical. On the one hand, people regard human relationships as a matter of preserving social reputation, something they must take into account; on the other hand, they view these relationships as burdensome and are unwilling to fully commit to them. Therefore, when interacting with others, people often care more about superficial acts meant for others to see, which brings no real benefit to themselves or others. In today's world, where material wealth is abundant, the genuine substance of human relationships often erodes, allowing personal gain to become the important and sometimes the sole bond between individuals. As the saying goes, "There are no permanent friends, only permanent interests."

Western culture emphasizes dualism and the separation of subject and object, taking humanity as the subject and the world as the object. Human understanding of the world simply aims to make it serve us better. Therefore, such exploration is often one-sided, short-sighted, and reckless, causing severe ecological degradation during the massive exploitation and utilization of resources.

Today, we often reflect, "What's wrong with people nowadays? What's wrong with society?" and complain, "It's not that I don't understand; the world is changing too fast." Indeed, there is unprecedented alienation, defensiveness, and hostility among people, and the damage humans have inflicted on the world has also reached an almost irreversible level. Why is this happening? There are many reasons, but the root cause lies in our inability to manage the

relationship with ourselves—we don't understand ourselves and have not cultivated a healthy mindset and character. When individuals filled with delusion and afflictions interact, they inevitably become entangled and conflict with each other due to their delusion and afflictions. This further leads to opposition between groups, ethnicities, and nations. Therefore, fostering a healthy character through self-understanding and enhancing the quality of life is crucial for the future of society. Only in this way can we fundamentally improve interactions between people and mend the rift between humans and nature.

# I

## **The Importance of Understanding the Self**

When it comes to “understanding the self,” some may think it's a metaphysical concept that only philosophy or religion concerns itself with. In fact, it's also a critical issue in real life, relating to various aspects such as learning, work, and more.

### **1. Learning Path**

In the process of learning, it's essential to understand ourselves: to discover our innate aptitudes and interests. Especially in areas beyond basic education, these two aspects are particularly important. This is because aptitudes offer a higher starting point, giving you a lead, while interests are the best teachers, providing continuous motivation.

From the perspective of Buddhism, life is an endless accumulation. Our arrival in this world marks the beginning of this life, but we are not a blank slate. We have an endless past in which we have done many things, learned much knowledge, and possessed many abilities—all of which become our starting point now. If we understand where our aptitudes lie—whether we excel in science, management, humanities, or arts—and then choose a field we love and receive appropriate education, we will grow faster and are less likely to have regrets in life.

Of course, this understanding is not simple, nor is it a matter of arbitrary choice. Especially when our minds are not yet mature, we may not know what we excel at, and our interests might change. Therefore, it is important to keep an open mind, try different things in practice, and engage in continuous exploration. If one can find a mentor to provide guidance through

uncertainties, the results can be significantly amplified. Some people worry about losing at the starting line, but there are many paths to take, and life is not just about the start but an endless relay race. Therefore, the most important thing is to find your own path.

## **2. Career Choice**

Understanding the self is equally important for establishing a direction of development when we step into society. Many students feel lost after graduation, unsure of what to do next. Even those considering starting their own business face various choices and often feel anxious about potential gains and losses.

What is most suitable for oneself? What makes success more attainable? It is essential to find out our strengths, the resources we currently have, and our aspirations. Only then can we align these with societal needs to find the appropriate position; otherwise, we will struggle to fit in, aiming too high but unwilling to settle for less. In fact, many people find themselves in this situation today. The phenomena of “involution” (intense and futile competition) and “lying flat” (giving up on trying to be competitive with others) both stem from insufficient self-understanding.

With a clear understanding of these issues, we can assess the situation and proceed step by step. When the causes and conditions are not right, we can recharge and prepare; when the causes and conditions are favorable, we can seize the opportunity immediately. As the saying goes, “Opportunity favors the prepared.” Blindly getting caught in unhealthy competition will lead to burnout and even harm our physical and mental health. For example, the rising incidence of sudden death among young people, especially death from overwork, is largely due to a lack of clear understanding of themselves and an inability to act within their means. On the other hand, aimless “lying flat” is wasting time, and squandering the rare, precious, and fleeting opportunity of human life.

## **3. Psychotherapy**

In recent years, with the increase in mental health issues, more people are starting to take this problem seriously. In the past, it was believed that only those who were noticeably different from the norm—the “insane”—needed treatment. Now, it’s recognized that nurturing the mind is as important as nurturing the body, requiring us to learn relevant knowledge to prevent issues before they arise. Additionally, regular check-ups and early intervention at the onset of illnesses are crucial; otherwise, conditions can become difficult to

reverse. Therefore, it's essential to be aware of our negative psychological tendencies and any obstacles in our personality. A lack of awareness can delay treatment and lead to ineffective solutions that address only the symptoms rather than the root cause.

How can we fundamentally solve mental health issues? As we know, psychology originated in the West and has a history of just over 200 years. In contrast, Buddhism has long been regarded as the study of the mind. It not only offers a thorough analysis of the nature of the mind but also addresses various levels of human needs. Over the past 2,500 years, it has been revered by countless people as a guide for cultivating the mind. By practicing its teachings, one can adjust their mental conduct, foster a healthy mindset, and even realize the true nature of the mind, thereby completely eliminating afflictions. It offers multiple benefits, including nurturing the mind, healing illnesses, and eradicating their root causes.

In comparison, psychology primarily addresses illnesses resulting from the excessive development of greed, aversion, and ignorance, while considering these traits as normal psychological states. However, as long as greed, aversion, and ignorance are not eradicated, the potential for illness remains. Therefore, since the last century, the Western psychological community has begun to incorporate Buddhist teachings and meditation techniques to enhance its theoretical frameworks and therapeutic approaches.

From a certain perspective, life can be seen as a product that encompasses both positive and negative mental conduct. Understanding ourselves involves introspection to see our current state and identify issues that need to be addressed. Only by eliminating defilements and cultivating positive qualities can we become increasingly healthy in character. The ultimate health is achieved by attaining the qualities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

#### **4. Philosophical Thinking**

Philosophy, also known as “philosophia,” means the love of wisdom. Compared to ever-changing knowledge, wisdom focuses not on phenomena but on essence, including understanding the nature of the world and of life. At its most fundamental, it is the understanding of oneself. Therefore, over 3,000 years ago, ancient Greek philosophers declared: “Know thyself.”

What happens if we do not know ourselves? According to the legend of the Sphinx's riddle, a monster would ask people at a crossroads each day: “What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?” If they couldn't guess, the monster would

devour them, causing many to lose their lives. Later, Prince Oedipus solved the riddle by answering: “Human.” Because as a baby, a person uses both hands and feet, like four legs; as an adult, they stand upright on two legs; and in old age, they lean on a cane as if they have three legs.

The profound lesson of this story is that if a person does not understand themselves, they will pay the heaviest price. Some may think this is merely a fable unrelated to themselves. However, consider this: if we do not know the value of being human or why we live, and merely drift through life aimlessly—how is that essentially different from losing our life?

## **5. Delusion and Enlightenment**

The Dharma teaches that every sentient being possesses Buddha-nature, the potential for awakening. In this regard, buddhas and sentient beings are equal, as expressed in the saying, “The mind, the buddha, and sentient beings—these three are no different.” So why, in appearance, are buddhas and sentient beings vastly different? Fundamentally, it’s simply a matter of delusion and enlightenment.

Delusion is the state of being obscured by inner ignorance. It is like being in the dark, where we inevitably have wild thoughts, worries, and fears. Life is much the same. It is filled with distorted thoughts and countless afflictions when we are lost due to ignorance. Enlightenment is like clearing away the fog to see one’s true nature. This is the core goal of Buddhist practice; only by grounding ourselves in the pursuit of enlightenment can all our actions align with the path. Otherwise, no matter what we do, we will drift further from the path. For Mahayana practitioners, it is not enough to understand ourselves and progress from delusion to awakening; we must also help others awaken, guiding all sentient beings from delusion to enlightenment.

The above highlights the importance of understanding the self from various perspectives. In terms of learning, it is the foundation of personal development; from a career perspective, it is the prerequisite for success; from a psychological viewpoint, it ensures mental health; from a philosophical angle, it is the essential understanding for being human; and from a Buddhist perspective, it is the key to dispelling delusion and achieving enlightenment.

# II

## What is the Self

When it comes to understanding the self, what exactly represents the “self”?

### 1. Common Understanding

We usually think of the “self” as having the following connotations.

Firstly, we often equate “self” with selfishness. For example, saying “you are so self-centered” actually means “you are very selfish” or “you only consider yourself.” From the perspective of Buddhism, this kind of self is similar to “attachment to self,” which is an attachment resulting from a wrong interpretation of the self.

Secondly, we often use “self” to represent a certain physical and mental state, or a specific individual. For example, when we speak of ourselves, we are referring to the five aggregates that make up our being; when we speak of someone else, we are referring to the five aggregates that make up their being.

Thirdly, we often use “self” to represent the unique aspects of our identity, thereby distinguishing ourselves from others. Every living being has a distinct personality and is a unique existence. In Western humanist thought, self-value is realized through freeing individuality.

Fourthly, from the psychological perspective, the mind is seen as a multifaceted and complex system. Just as an airplane’s ability to fly depends on the interplay of many parts and the fuel, and not on any single component alone, the self operates in a similar way. It is not a singular entity but rather a systemic function, composed of numerous factors that contribute to its existence.

The above primarily defines the self from a phenomenal perspective.

### 2. The Self in Other Religions

We know that phenomena are constantly changing—our bodies will perish, and consciousness will dissolve. Therefore, what religion seeks is the essential self, something that can serve as the ultimate reliance of life.

Christianity holds that the physical body will perish after several decades in the earthly world, but the soul is eternal. It will either ascend to heaven for everlasting joy or descend to hell for eternal suffering. Thus, the soul is considered the most essential aspect of existence.

Brahmanism in India believes that the universe has a Supreme Self, known as Brahman, and individual life has an Individual Self, known as Atman. Through spiritual practice, the Individual Self can merge with the Supreme Self, achieving the state of unity of Brahman and Atman. Compared to the phenomenal self, the Supreme Self is what holds eternal significance.

The above represents the views of common religions, which hold that beyond the physical body, there is a higher essence.

### **3. The Self in Buddhism**

Buddhism's understanding of the self focuses on both phenomena and essence. The phenomenal self, according to Buddhism, is called the "false self." But what about the essence of the self? We know that Buddhism's greatest distinction from other religions is the concept of "no-self." Therefore, the essence of the self that Buddhism discusses refers to the mind. Buddhism believes that everyone possesses a mind that is non-dual in emptiness and clarity, representing the ultimate existence of life.

To understand the essence of the mind, the prerequisite is to see clearly the false self of phenomena. The reason people have so many afflictions is that they are deluded by the false self. This false self is rootless; because it is hollow, it seeks support everywhere. The problem is that all the supports we can find are impermanent; not only can they not make the false self permanent, but in various changes, they instead impact the false self, thus bringing afflictions and suffering, and further deepening our delusion.

Therefore, understanding both the phenomenal self and its essence of the self is equally necessary. Focusing on the phenomenal self is meant to eliminate delusion and avoid being deceived by the false self, thereby recognizing the true nature of the mind and unlocking the potential for inner awakening.



# III

## Problems Arising from Losing the Self

What negative consequences might arise in life from not knowing oneself?

### 1. Feeling Insecure

A sense of security is something that modern people are particularly concerned about. For example, the enduring popularity of taking the civil service exams in recent years reflects people's persistent pursuit of job security. Living in this world, we treat our bodies, careers, wealth, and families as the anchors of "self." However, in today's rapidly changing world, we see more clearly than ever that all these things are constantly in flux, and nothing is truly reliable. Where is the direction of life? What is the meaning of life? If we place our value on external things, we will inevitably feel insecure and rootless.

From another perspective, with the rapid advancement of technology, the tools humans use are becoming increasingly sophisticated, and the weapons more destructive. At the same time, moral qualities have not improved correspondingly; human nature has not become healthier; instead, more problems have emerged. This creates a dual danger for the world. Think of the existing nuclear weapons; think of the conflicts among people; indeed, we can feel that our current situation is precarious. In such a context, the wisdom of Buddha Dharma becomes particularly important. Only by understanding ourselves can we know what provides us with a foundation and a sense of mission in life, and what truly benefits ourselves, others, and the world. Only then do we not fear being swept toward destruction by the torrent of collective karma.

### 2. Misidentification

Not understanding ourselves means that we will misidentify who we are, which is the root of all afflictions. Clinging to the body as the self, we will fear that we too will disappear as the body deteriorates. Clinging to identity as the self, we will exhaust ourselves in maintaining various identities. Clinging to emotions as the self, we will be swayed by feelings

of “I am happy” or “I am unhappy,” leading to deluded thoughts. Whatever we cling to will inevitably control us, turning us into puppets without freedom.

Many things happen in our lives every day, and the impact they have on us depends on our understanding. Starting from self-attachment, every event becomes deeply entangled with us, bringing endless afflictions and harm. Only by observing with wisdom and seeing that everything arises and ceases due to conditions can we accept gains and losses with equanimity.

### **3. Losing Oneself, Chasing Externals**

Not knowing ourselves leads to a primal sense of lack in life, driving us to constantly create new desires. These desires push us to chase after external things, and in the process, we develop dependencies. As these dependencies deepen, our desires increase, further strengthening our dependencies. This dependency is not only material but also spiritual. As a result, people today rarely find the capacity to relax and enjoy some quiet time with themselves. Instead, they allow various forms of digital entertainment and social media to occupy every moment outside of their work and life, drawing themselves deeper into the vortex and losing their sense of direction.

Losing oneself and chasing externals is precisely the root of samsara, the cycle of birth and death. Samsara does not necessarily mean the transition from this life to the next; it also represents the repetition of psychological patterns. Some people are trapped in the samsara of power struggles, others in the relentless pursuit of career success, wealth accumulation, or artistic endeavors. At its core, samsara is an endless cycle of craving and pursuit. If we cannot see ourselves clearly, we will be constantly caught in samsara in various aspects of life, trapped in the mental patterns we create. This cycle then continues from this life into the future. Therefore, understanding ourselves and finding the true foundation of life is the key to transcending samsara.

### **4. Three Feelings of the Self**

Beyond survival, people generally pursue three feelings: a sense of self-importance, a sense of superiority, and the desire to dominate.

The sense of self-importance, in traditional Chinese culture, is about bringing honor to one's ancestors and becoming a person of high status. Western philosophy emphasizes individual

freedom and uniqueness, which is also a pursuit of self-importance. The sense of superiority is primarily achieved through comparison. In the past, people had a limited range of references, and it was not easy to obtain this feeling. But today, we can see the world's elites and their lifestyles and pleasures through the media at any time. Trying to maintain a sense of importance and superiority in such a reference system is undoubtedly a recipe for self-inflicted misery. As for the desire to dominate, that's even more exhausting. Think about it: we often can't even control ourselves, so how can we control others? How many parent-child and marital relationships have deteriorated because of the desire to dominate? If even the closest relationships are like this, what about others?

So, whose needs are these three feelings ultimately satisfying? What is their value? If examined with wisdom, they cannot withstand analysis. But because we have lost our true selves, we rely on these feelings to maintain a self that is outwardly strong but inwardly weak.

Where does the value of life come from? On the one hand, it comes from enhancing the quality of life. On the other hand, it comes from benefiting more sentient beings. If we focus solely on pursuing self-importance, superiority, and the desire to dominate, no matter how hard we try, what can we gain? The sense of self-importance adds unnecessary pressure and makes us feel overwhelmed; the sense of superiority leads to comparison and competition, sometimes even vicious competition; and the desire to dominate disrupts the harmony of inter-personal relationships.

## IV

### Understanding of the Self in Buddhism

In Buddhism, the "self" is merely a concept designated by a name. So how does Buddha Dharma perceive and describe the self?

#### 1. Self-Attachment and No-Self

Attachment to the self refers to the incorrect belief in an independently existing, unchanging "self" in life. In reality, like all phenomena in the world, life is determined by a myriad of conditions. Without the five aggregates of form, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness, what is the "self," and where is it? However, due to ignorance, ordinary beings

cling to the physical body—which is merely a temporary combination of the four great elements<sup>1</sup>—and to various mental activities, mistaking both for the “self.” Consequently, this strong attachment creates karma, samsara, and endless suffering.

In Buddhism, another concept associated with the “self” is “no-self.” The notion of no-self can be puzzling, as one might wonder how there can be no “self” when one clearly exists, being able to speak, laugh, and move. However, what Buddha Dharma seeks to negate is not the manifestation of life through dependent origination, but rather the erroneous perception of the self. Only by removing this misunderstanding can we see through the phenomena and discover the true essence of life: the awakened mind.

## **2. The False Self of Dependent Origination**

Dependent origination means that life phenomena are formed by the combination of multiple conditions, primarily categorized into physical and mental aspects. The physical aspect includes elements like bones, muscles, and organs as discussed in Western medicine, or meridians and acupuncture points as in Traditional Chinese Medicine. The mental aspect pertains to the eight consciousnesses described in the doctrine of Consciousness-Only (*Yogacara*). The first six consciousnesses are eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, and mind consciousness, which we can perceive. Additionally, there are subconscious levels that we cannot perceive, namely the seventh consciousness, *Manas*, and the eighth consciousness, *Alaya*, the latter of which stores all experiences accumulated during the continuity of life. All our thoughts, words, and deeds plant “seeds” in the Alaya consciousness, creating potential forces. When conditions ripen, these seeds manifest as actions, which in turn form new seeds. All these occur in accordance with the law of dependent origination and causality, where such causes lead to such effects. There is no “self” acting as the master.

Some might say: “Since the self is false, why bother with it? Why practice at all?” It is crucial to understand that “false” does not mean non-existent. In reality, when we are hungry, we need to eat, and when we are sick, we feel discomfort. If we fail to properly understand and manage this false self, it can have a tangible impact on our physical and mental well-being, leading to endless suffering in our lives. The Consciousness-Only School speaks of the three

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to the “temporary union of the four elements” in Buddhism. It describes how the physical body is composed of four fundamental elements that come together conditionally and temporarily, without any inherent or permanent existence. These four elements are: Earth, Water, Fire and Wind.

natures, with the dependent nature at its core, and considers the understanding of dependent origination as the key threshold in practice. By correctly understanding dependent origination, one can realize emptiness and attain liberation. Misunderstanding dependent origination leads to afflictions and the cycle of birth and death. Therefore, although the “self” is false, it remains an essential tool for cultivating the true nature through the false self.

Everyone wants to become a better version of themselves. But what truly defines a better self? Most people focus solely on external appearances and achievements, while some may seek both inner and outer cultivation, appreciating personal interests and cultural refinement. Yet, these are merely surface-level spiritual activities. On a deeper level, what truly defines us are our mindset and the quality of our being. These two aspects shape who we are: beings trapped in ignorance, afflictions, and delusions, or beings filled with wisdom, compassion, and kindness. Do we cause suffering for ourselves and others, or do we bring joy to ourselves and those around us?

What kind of being we are depends on the components of our false self. If it is composed of negative mental activities, it will continually generate suffering. Take greed, for example: people who are very greedy suffer when they have no money, and even when they have it, they still remain dissatisfied, always wanting more. If greed is not addressed, this kind of suffering is endless. It’s like having a virus in the body, constantly causing problems and leading to illness. That’s why understanding and transforming our false self is crucial.

### **3. The Awakened Mind**

Beyond seeing through the false self, what is more important is to understand the awakened mind. But how? Although there are many Dharma methods, they can mainly be categorized into two approaches: gradual cultivation and sudden enlightenment. These approaches are designed according to the different capacities of practitioners. Some are burdened with thick layers of defilements and must “constantly strive to sweep away the dust,” using precepts, concentration, and wisdom to sweep away these defilements, and gradually progress deeper. Others, with sharp faculties, especially during the flourishing of Chan Buddhism, are more likely to break through the duality of subject and object under the guidance of an enlightened master. In special circumstances, they can directly experience their true nature. This directness is possible because the awakened nature is inherently present in all sentient beings, merely obscured by ignorance. Once it is uncovered, everything is inherently complete and perfect, with nothing lacking and nothing in excess.

Thus, the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* begins by stating, “The self-nature of Bodhi is originally pure and clear. Simply use that mind, and you can attain Buddhahood directly.” This tells us that the awakened mind exists within all beings. This mind neither decreases in the ordinary nor increases in the enlightened; it can generate and encompass all phenomena. It is as vast and infinite as the void, yet possesses the function of clear and discerning awareness. Practice is about realizing this mind, which is no different from the minds of all buddhas. This mind is also referred to in Chan Buddhism as the “original face,” which represents our true self.

It can be seen that Buddha Dharma offers a multi-layered understanding of the self. It not only addresses the phenomenal self but also guides us to realize the awakened nature through practice. This is precisely what sets Buddhism apart from other religions and philosophies.

## V

### The Value of the Self

How can a person realize their self-value in life?

#### 1. The Difference in Value Between Freedom and Liberation

The humanistic movement in the West advocated for the freedom of individuality to spark creativity and realize the value of life. This was a rebellion against the theocratic rule of the Middle Ages, leading to the flourishing of science, art, and philosophy, as well as significant prosperity in material civilization. However, such freedom has also excessively stimulated human desires, resulting in a range of social and ecological problems.

The core objective of Buddhist practice is liberation, which, like the freedom of individuality, involves breaking free from constraints. The difference lies in that liberation is based on a thorough understanding of the nature of the mind. Although we have Buddha-nature, it remains obscured and unseen due to our current state as ordinary beings. What dominates is often our demonic nature—negative mental states such as greed, aversion, and ignorance. If we pursue freedom blindly and without discernment, it can easily spiral out of control, releasing both wholesome and unwholesome qualities altogether.

Therefore, liberation is directed toward a specific goal. When we talk about liberation, we often see it as crossing from this shore to the other or from this life to another. It may seem like a religious practice that is unrelated to ordinary people. In fact, the focus of liberation is to dispel inner delusion, as well as greed, aversion, and ignorance. From this perspective, everyone needs liberation. When we counteract a specific affliction, we are liberated from that affliction; when we alleviate a particular suffering, we are liberated from that suffering. Furthermore, we must cultivate positive qualities such as compassion and wisdom. Only in this way can we realize the ultimate value of life.

## **2. The Principles for Realizing the Value of Life**

There are two kinds of values described in Buddhism: mundane and ultimate. To attain either, one must adhere to the following principles.

The first is the principle of cause and effect, meaning that one's values must withstand the scrutiny of causality. Confucianism emphasizes achieving merits and teaching noble ideas, but this is often based on the standards of a particular time and place, without considering the long-term significance of these merits and teachings on humanity. The West advocates for individual freedom, paying little attention to what it ultimately brings to oneself and society. In contrast, Buddhism believes that self-value must endure the examination of causality. It must be beneficial not only in the present but also in the future, not only for oneself but also for all sentient beings—we should not focus merely on immediate personal gains.

The second is the principle of morality. Many people believe that morality is only a demand from society, not a need of the individual. Therefore, when most people disregard morality, following it oneself seems to put one at a disadvantage. But according to Buddhism, all our words and deeds and even our thoughts are the building materials of life. Just as constructing a building relies on bricks, wood, and cement, the three karmas of our body, speech, and mind are the fundamental components of our character. Positive mental actions create a healthy character, while negative ones result in a flawed character. To realize our self-value, we must adhere to morality. Otherwise, it would be like using inferior materials to construct a dangerous building that is doomed to collapse.

The third is the principle of wisdom. Rationality is a double-edged sword; it can bring development to society and well-being to the people, but it can also cause destruction and suffering. Wisdom, on the other hand, is the understanding of the truth about life and the

world. Only with wisdom can we know what is truly beneficial for the development of life and fundamentally transform ourselves. Otherwise, if we cannot even see clearly what the self truly is, how can we realize our self-value? Even if we manage to attain part of it, it will be incomplete and may even bring various side effects.

The fourth is the principle of compassion. Compassion is a crucial component of one's character and the warmth of the world. To elevate ourselves, foster social harmony, and benefit all beings, compassion is indispensable. In my work the *Philanthropic Spirit of Entrepreneurs*, I mentioned that many people equate philanthropy with donating money. In fact, what is more important is that we learn the wisdom culture and cultivate a heart of great compassion and love. By practicing kindness with such a loving heart, we can not only help others, but also adjust our own mindset, enhance our quality of life, and thereby realize our self-value.

## VI

### Conclusion

People all live their lives centered on the self, always considering and being controlled by it. However, the self is often what they understand the least. Due to this lack of understanding, everything they do in service of the self often goes astray. It's like pulling chestnuts out of the fire—intending to gain benefit but ending up suffering hardship and getting hurt. This is the root cause of all problems. Therefore, understanding the self is a significant issue in life.

In the preceding discussion, the self has been explored from five perspectives: that of ordinary people, psychology, philosophy, other religions, and Buddhism. Through these interpretations, especially Buddhism's analysis of the self, I hope that everyone will realize the importance of understanding the self, thereby embarking on a beautiful life and creating a harmonious and joyful world.