

# **Beautification of life**

**By Master JiQun**

## **Chapter 1: External Beauty and Internal Beauty**

People are very concerned about the beauty and appearance of their body. In fact, such beauty is fleeting. Just as the old saying goes, “Beauty will fade; youth will not last forever.” From the perspective of Buddhism, everything in the world is impermanent. Throughout our life, our body grows from short to tall, reaches its prime and then starts to decline. The various changes it undergoes are like footsteps of time, which always advance without a slight pause. Therefore, attempting to stay forever young is a pipe dream, because it goes against the law of nature. For thousands of years, a vast number of people have relentlessly searched for the secret of eternal youth. However, the greatest achievement so far has only been to slow down the aging process.

In contrast to external appearance, inner beauty is long-lasting. It will not fade with aging. On the contrary, it only shines after long-term accumulation, just as an uncut jade will only reveal its bright and pure beauty after numerous steps of cutting, grinding and polishing.

Inner beauty is the beauty of character, mind and life quality. In Buddhism, the ultimate state of inner beauty is that of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Of course, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas not only have inner beauty but also display external beauty. According to the Sutras, the Buddha has thirty-two marks of excellence and eighty noble physical characteristics. That is to say, every part of the Buddha body is flawless. The perfection of such body is neither due to cosmetics nor plastic surgery. Rather, it owes to the immeasurable merits of the Buddha’s achievements. Such impeccable look with abundant merits and dignity is summarized in a sutra: “A majestic look comes from a hundred good deeds.”

## **Chapter 2: The Ultimate State of Being**

When we talk about Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, they seem to be quite far away as if they belong to another place and time. In fact, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not symbols of status. Rather they represent consummate qualities of compassion and wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to eliminate afflictions and understand the truth about life. Compassion is a vow to help all sentient beings to be free from afflictions; to destroy delusion and attain enlightenment.

Many people like visiting temples to offer incense and pay homage to the Buddha. A wondrous serenity and peace of mind envelops us when we look up at the image of the Buddha. Of course, not all statues can properly represent the state of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This requires great craft, and more importantly, a deep understanding of the nature of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

What then are the exact expression and appearance of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas?

They present infinite quietness. This silence is not soundless silence but inner tranquility. It is

like a mountain which reaches ultimate stillness, but also like a sound whose vibration can reach up to heaven and penetrate the earth, with an indescribable and overwhelming power. This is what is called “Nirvana is perfect tranquility” in the Three Seals of the Dharma (Three Universal Truths). Such tranquility comes from the inner mind when all restlessness is pacified and embodies the ultimate truth of the universe and existence. Not only does such stillness benefit Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, it also purifies people and even their surroundings.

They embody infinite openness. The most prominent feature of an ordinary mind is its restlessness, constantly wavering between ever-changing delusions. The mind seeks calmness but fails. It wants to rest but cannot rest well. It wants to think but cannot concentrate. Why? It is because the mind is cluttered with rubbish which has never been cleared. This prevents us from seeing what we really need in our life. Thus, we keep ourselves busy all the time, covering such ignorance with superficial fulfillments. The result is a continuous creation of delusion and spiritual waste. However, as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have realized emptiness, they are able to perceive that the five aggregates <sup>[1]</sup> are empty in their own nature. This is similar to the sky after the dispersion of clouds, which is clear, clean and pure.

They enjoy infinite happiness. Such happiness is not the joy we generally refer to, which is a relief from pain and conditional. When we feel joy, we may become attached to it. But once the conditions change, our reliance on joy will be lost, and we may experience suffering. Therefore, worldly joy is fleeting and has side effects. The happiness of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, however, comes from the inside and spreads throughout the entire body, which the Buddhist sutras refer to as “the whole body smile”. Only those enlightened ones who have perceived “anatta” (no-self) can glow with smile and exude joy from every pore.

Therefore, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas represent the ultimate state of being. To learn from the Buddha is to set the Buddha as an example, continuously eliminating unwholesome mental attitudes and developing our potential noble qualities. When our life no longer has any flaws, we also can become a pure, honest, kind and beautiful person to the utmost degree, just like Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

### **Chapter 3: Only That Which is Good Is Beautiful**

We must not only pay attention to external beauty, but also give importance to internal beauty so it can shine and radiate enduringly. Because mind and body are interdependent and mutually affect each other. When we are depressed, our body becomes heavy and even develops various illnesses. When we are in a cheerful mood, our body is totally relaxed, and even diseases, if any, will also be eased. Therefore, it is of great significance to improve our inner life. How then can we beautify and dignify our life?

[1] Five Aggregates: Form (Rupa), Sensations (Vedana), Perception (Samjna), Mental Formations (Sankhara) and Consciousness (Vijnana)

We first need to understand our existence. In fact, life is also a product, a product made from ignorance. For living beings like us made of “five aggregates”, our most essential attributes are our mind and our human nature which can either be wholesome or unwholesome. According to Confucianism, people can become sages and virtuous beings, but can also turn into beasts in human clothing. Western religions hold similar views, believing that humans have both divine and evil inclinations. These exemplify the duality of human nature.

The conclusion drawn by Buddhism is that human beings have a Buddha-nature as well as the nature of sentient beings. When he attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, the Buddha discovered that every living being equally possesses the potential qualities of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Therefore, although we are just ordinary people overwhelmed by confusion, there is still hope for us. If we can develop this inner potential quality, we can realize what the Buddha has achieved. In Buddhism, there is a saying that all sentient beings are equal. However, the equality here does not refer to the equality at the level of phenomenon. Rather, such equality means anyone has the potential to become a Buddha. This is also one of the important characteristics that differentiate Buddhism from other religions. No other religion believes that followers are equals to the object of devotion and that they, in turn, can become objects of their own devotion through practice.

However, we should not be blindly optimistic, thinking that there is no need to hurry since we possess such precious potential. We need to know that before such treasure is explored, although it exists, it does not come into play. This is because the state of our life is that of an ordinary person which is subject to greed, anger and ignorance; in other words, natural human instincts. If we do not use our current incarnation as humans to cultivate ourselves with great efforts, we will neither recognize the inner treasure we carry nor bring its value into play.

Secondly, we should know what in life is considered beauty and what is not. In the Buddha Dharma, such beauty is referred to as goodness. Otherwise, it is referred to as evil. Then, how does Buddhism define goodness and evil?

Buddhism believes that behaviors which can bring us happy outcome and future benefits are considered good while those that bring negative results and future damage are regarded as evil. Such cause and effect happen not only in the external world but also in our mind. When kind thoughts arise, our mind is filled with joy, which brings harmony and warmth to ourselves and others. In contrast, when evil thoughts arise, it is like a disease that is triggered, which causes various adverse reactions. Our mind and body will feel tormented and painful. Some may argue that there are those who find happiness in doing evil. This flawed and abnormal joy is the result of a disturbed state of mind. Therefore, evil will incur suffering not only in the future, but also in one's heart at the present moment. Furthermore, when evil is perpetrated, it will cause pain to others.

On the surface, we seem to live in the same world. The truth is that we live in our own spiritual world. What kind of mind we have determines what kind of world we see.

If you think all people are bad, you become hostile toward everybody, which creates conflict, a feeling of tension and oppression. With such a thought, you treat everyone in the world as your enemy, and live in a state of extreme nervousness. How can you be happy with this kind of emotion? It doesn't necessarily need to apply to all people: even if you think someone is bad, it will tie a knot in your heart. And next time when you think of such a person, the knot will appear again and continue to torment you. Maybe this person has no idea that you hate him or her, but you have been consumed and exhausted by your hatred. The same is true with greed, ignorance and jealousy. Therefore, all negative emotions cause nothing but harm.

#### **Chapter 4: Understand the Mind to Managing It**

Each person experiences various mental states that shift all the time: sometimes happy while sometimes sad; sometimes excited while sometimes frustrated; sometimes generous while sometimes unforgiving; sometimes loving while sometimes apathetic. For some people, opportunities for these mental states to occur are basically equal. Thus, their personality reveals diverse facets. For others, certain mental traits will be particularly developed and dominant, making them obviously inclined to good or evil.

On this lively and peculiar stage of the mind, these mental activities give their performances one after another. However, because we have never managed our own mind, we never figured out how these are generated, how they behave and how they shift from one to another. Some people may think: "Isn't it good and wonderful if we can let nature take its course and go with the flow?" But we need to know that just as we generate rubbish any time in our lives, our words and deeds also leave traces and produce spiritual defilements. If left untreated, the rubbish of craving, hatred and ignorance will not decompose by itself; rather, it will breed new problems.

It is of great importance to understand how mental patterns are formed. We are not living in reality but in our own inner world. Everything we see has already been projected through our emotions and processed through our thoughts. If you think someone is good, everything about him seems perfect. If you don't, everything in him turns unpleasant. This impression you have of someone may just be the opposite of what others have said about him or her. Why? The reason is what you see in fact is not the real "person", but the person you feel.

How can we manage our mind?

Our mind is like a field. If you plant thorny bushes, the field will be covered with thorny bushes, which will bring you misery. If you plant flowers, the field will produce beautiful flowers which will bring you joy. Therefore, our daily thoughts and deeds are very important as they are the seeds we sow in our own mind.

What we think and what we do produce two types of outcomes. One is the extrinsic or objective result while the other is the intrinsic result. The latter is the mental record of our thoughts or,

in the Dharma's words, the seed of thoughts. When the seed of a thought is in a proper environment, it will keep growing and gather momentum. When the energy of a thought is strong enough, it will compel us to repeat it and will become increasingly stronger in the process of accumulation. When a mindset is developed to a certain extent, it can dominate our whole existence. If the mindset is negative, our life will fall victim of it. Think about criminals, they certainly hurt other people, but aren't they victims as well? The difference is that they are the victims of their own afflictions and negative attitude. Besides, some people are victims to love, some to fame and wealth, others to vanity or gambling. These phenomena can be found everywhere in life.

Why would this happen? It is because these people have never tried to manage their own mind. Unnoticeably, their unhealthy mentality gains strength and they become enslaved by it. To reverse the situation, people must understand and effectively manage their own mind. In life, nothing is more important than this endeavor, because our mind is most closely related to us and we can't escape or abandon it.

## **Chapter 5: Adjusting the Mindset Through Changing Views**

The most serious problem in modern society is people's unhealthy mentality. When many people reach a certain level of material wealth, they don't find themselves as happy as they have expected — some even have developed various psychological problems that are difficult to cure. They then begin to realize that problems in life can't be solved just through material comfort because the root cause lies in our own mind. Consequently, psychology has also begun to attract the attention of all circles in society.

Except for negative mental attitudes, there are many positive qualities in our mind, which we need to train ardently in order to improve our life. Every behavior leaves a trace and builds up strength. This strength is accumulated as mental habits and over time, becomes our character, shapes our personality, and eventually affect our current life quality. However, human nature is not immutable and we can change it through the practice of the Dharma. Otherwise, there would be little hope for us to improve our condition.

According to the Buddha Dharma, everything in the world has a dependent origination which is impermanent and unstable. The key to improving our life lies in adjustment. How should we adjust? Everyone's existence consists of two factors, one consists of the views we have about life, and the other is our mindset. Views bring about mindset while mindset influences the formation of views.

Every day we deal with lots of issues, which influence us to different extents. Is it possible that the same issue influences every person in the same way? Of course not. To what extent the issue influences a person is up to how he or she sees it, rather than the issue itself. In fact, anything leads to infinite possibilities. If we can face it in a correct way, we will understand that a good thing can transform into a bad thing and a bad thing can turn into a good thing. This is also called "Misfortune may be a blessing in disguise."

Emptiness is the most ultimate concept in Buddhism. It tells us that every moment is infinite. However, because of our understanding and assumptions, we think of it as limited. Therefore, the key is the way we view it. If we see things from our own subjective viewpoint, what we see is a projection of our own beliefs, which leads to conflicts and desire for gain and fear for loss, generating an unwholesome mindset. On the contrary, if we observe everything with wisdom, we can instantly transcend worldly affairs, eliminating all concerns about gains, losses and conflicts.

## **Chapter 6: A Sickness of the Mind Requires Mind Remedy**

The beautification of life is to realize that there are different dimensions in our existence, and allow ourselves to make relevant changes. The beauty of the body is based on health, and so is our mind. Only a healthy mind can make life radiant. So, what is a healthy mind and what is not? From the perspective of the Buddha Dharma, wisdom brings health while ignorance is unhealthy.

Ignorance here does not mean the absence of knowledge we commonly refer to. I believe that all of you have your own professional knowledge and ability to cope with life. By ignorance, I mean being ignorant of the fundamental questions of humankind, such as who I am, where I came from, where I will go, why we are alive and what on earth is fate. Some people wonder why we must think about these issues. Couldn't we live without asking such questions?

In fact, these are the eternal questions of human beings. A person who thinks deeply about life will definitely need to face these questions and try to look for answers. On the other hand, all afflictions derive from these questions. Everyday we pay attention to and care about ourselves. Each of us thinks "I" am in love, "I" hate, "I" am sad, and regards these emotions as part of our life. In fact, these emotions don't represent "I". They are just spiritual tumors resulting from our life's development.

Without a healthy lifestyle, our body would be sick. Without correct views and sound mental attitude, our inner turmoil would expand and cause spiritual afflictions. Nowadays although material conditions have increasingly improved, psychological illnesses, such as depression, autism and mania, are spreading at an unprecedented rate. These diseases disturb people's normal life, and in some instances, may even lead some to self-destruction. Relevant statistics show that depression will become the second largest life-threatening condition in this century. Only in China, there are around 30 million patients suffering from depression. Worldwide, more than 500 million people are affected by this disease. How astonishing this number is!

Then what is the remedy to such suffering? As the saying goes, "seek your salve where you get your sore". The mind must be the focal point for treatment. We must understand that these defilements do not represent "me" and that they are just aberrations that occur in the continuity of life. In other words, we should take defilements as the object of our observation rather than always care about them and follow them. As a result, unwholesome thoughts and emotions will

gradually subside. Buddhist meditation can produce exactly the above effect.

If we liken our mind to a stage, then our various thoughts will be the performers who go up on the stage alternatively and continuously. And if we are attached to these characters and fly the flag for each of them as they appear on stage, we will exhaust our life in such chaos. This is not only a waste of our identity as humans, but, more dreadfully, leads us to accumulate unhealthy habits, which will influence future lives. The correct attitude is neither adhering nor rejecting, which means that one does not adhere to a thought no matter how he likes it, nor does he reject a thought no matter how he hates it. When the mind is equanimous, thoughts will fade away due to our lack of response. Otherwise, we will be controlled by these surging and falling thoughts, and at the same time inject energy into them, making them increasingly powerful. Each time we stick to one thought, it will be strengthened. When such thought is powerful enough, it will be difficult for us to manage.

Because of ignorance, we take many things that are impersonal as self. Why do people fear death? It is because we consider our body as self. Naturally, we would be afraid that “I” would vanish when our body ceases to function. However, if we understand that the physical body is only a temporary abode in the continuum of life, then we won’t be so frightened or even panicked at the idea of facing death.

Life is like a river in which our present physical body is a mere ripple. Waves come and go but the river keeps running. Should we understand this, we wouldn’t be mentally harmed by birth, aging, sickness and death of our body. Otherwise, we will only frighten ourselves. Holding on to the fact that there is a self in the body makes us cling to our body, which unavoidably incurs suffering.

What we care about most is our family, wealth, career and children; and the reason we care is that they are things that we label with “I” or “my”. Given this assumption, “My” family should be better-off than others; “my” fortune should be more important than others; “my” career should be more successful than others; and “my” children should be more special than others. All the comparisons lead to further competition. Feelings of self-importance and superiority will generate a desire for domination, which tempts people to control others. Such a life will be overwhelmed by conflicts everywhere.

## **Chapter 7: Keep Both Body and Mind Healthy**

Modern people tend to be restless. When such restlessness occurs, it not only affects us internally, but also influences our temperament and appearance. Even someone who has impeccable looks will not be appreciated if he or she is restless and uneasy. On the contrary, someone who is tranquil and peaceful will emit a transcendent and noble bearing regardless of his or her ordinary appearance. As the saying goes: “people are beautiful because of their charm, but not the other way around”, which exactly proves the above truth.

If we hope our life to be beautiful and sublime, we need to establish a healthy lifestyle both

physically and psychologically.

First, we must learn to feel at ease with things. All afflictions are related to our attachment. Only those things we care so much about will hurt us. And the extent to which these things hurt us depends upon the importance we give them. Less attachment leads to less afflictions and pain, while more attachment just brings the opposite. If we remove our wrong assumptions about things, there will be no unnecessary pain and misery brought by attachment.

Second, we must keep a peaceful and regular lifestyle, and learn to enjoy leisure time. We have been accustomed to a busy routine. When we are idle, we like to chat, surf on the Internet, and watch television immediately. Nowadays, people would rather do some apparently uninteresting things than enjoy their leisure quietly. In fact, they don't have the ability to enjoy such leisure, because their restless mind lacks support and they need to seek for stimulation all the time. In reality, our mind is complete. The key is to experience and recognize this fact. The goal of mediation is to help us understand the potential power of our mind, so that we will not blindly seek for external support.

In our life, it is most important to have right views and a healthy mindset. In this way, we can face all the changes in the world calmly and will not be swayed by fortune or adversity. Furthermore, we should cultivate intentions to benefit all sentient beings. Such a life is indeed beautiful and meaningful.