

Liao-Fan's Four Lessons

Interpreted by Mr. Zhi-Hai Huang

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- The First Lesson: Learning To Create Destiny
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The First Lesson: Learning To Create Destiny

[Narrator]: "Creating Destiny" is about forming one's fate rather than be bound by it. The Lesson of Learning to Create Destiny herein discusses the principle behind fate and the knowledge necessary to change it. By relating his own experience and trials at changing destiny, Mr. Liao-Fan Yuan taught his son, Tien-Chi not to be bound by fate, but rather to put forth his best effort in practicing kindness and cutting off evil. One should not reject doing a kind act simply because it seems to be a minute goodness, or commit an evil deed simply because it appears to be a small evil. If one practices in a proper manner, it is assured that one's destiny can be changed. It is often said, "Refraining from all evil and practicing all forms of kindness brings about the dispersion of disasters and the coming of fortune". This is the principle behind creating one's destiny.

[Liao-Fan]: My father passed away when I was young, and mother persuaded me to learn medicine instead of becoming a scholar. Mother said to me:

[Mother]: Learning medicine will be a good way to support yourself and also to help others. Besides, having a skill on hand, you will never have to worry about making a living, and you can even become famous through your medical skills. This has always been an ambition your father had for you.

[Liao-Fan]: One day, at the Compassionate Cloud Temple, I met an elderly but distinguished looking man who had a long beard and had such a look of a sage that I immediately paid my respects to him. The old man told me:

[Old Man]: You are destined to become a government official. You can attain the rank of Erudite First Level Scholar next year, why aren't you studying for the exam?

[Liao-Fan]: So I told him of my mother's instructions to give up scholarly study for learning medicine. Then I asked for his name, birthplace, and residence. He replied:

[Old Man]: My last name is Kong. I came from Yunnan Province. I have inherited the knowledge of Mr. Shao, who developed the art of prediction very well. By calculations, I'm supposed to pass it on to you.

[Liao-Fan]: Therefore, I led Mr. Kong to my home and told my mother about him. Mother told me to treat him well and said:

[Mother]: Since Mr. Kong is so good at predicting the future, he must also know our past. Let's ask him and test his authenticity.

[Liao-Fan]: As a result, I found Mr. Kong's calculations to be very accurate, even in very small cases. After hearing his words of advice, I once again thought about studying. I then consulted with my cousin Shen-chen. He recommended thus:

[Cousin]: "My friend, Mr. Hai-gu Yu is teaching at the home of Yo-fu Sheng. It would be very convenient for me to take you there for boarding and studying.

[Liao-Fan]: This was how I became Mr. Yu's student. Once again Mr. Kong made a prediction for me. He said:

[Mr. Kong]: As a student, you will place fourteenth in the county examination, seventy-first at the regional exam, and ninth at the provincial examination.

[Liao-Fan]: The following year, at the three places of examination, I placed exactly as he had predicted. Then Mr. Kong calculated the predictions for my entire life. He said:

[Mr. Kong]: You will pass such and such a test in such and such a year, you will become a civil servant in such a year, and in such a year you will get a promotion. Finally, you will be appointed as a magistrate in Szechuan Province. After holding that office for three and a half years, you will resign and return home. At the age of fifty-three, you will die around one o'clock in the morning on August 14th. It's a pity that you will not have a son.

[Liao-Fan]: I recorded and remembered all that he said. From then on, the outcome of every examination I took turned out exactly as Mr. Kong predicted. Mr. Kong also predicted that I would be promoted only after receiving a salary in the weight of ninety-one dans and five dous of rice. However, I had received only seventy-one dans of rice when the senior educational official Mr. Tu recommended me for a promotion. I secretly began to doubt Mr. Kong's predictions.

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[Liao–Fan]: Nevertheless, the prediction turned out to be correct after all, because the recommendation was turned down by Mr. Tu's superior, Mr. Yang. It was not until several years later when Mr. Chiu–min Ying saw my old exam papers and exclaimed:

[Mr. Ying]: These five essays are as well written as reports to the Emperor! How can we bury the talents of such a great scholar?

[Liao–Fan]: Mr. Ying wanted the magistrate to issue an official order for me to become a candidate for 'imperial student' under his authority. After undergoing this eventful promotion, my calculations showed that I had received exactly ninety–one dans and five dous of rice. From then on, whether it was promotion, rank, or wealth, I deeply believed that all came in due time. Even the length of one's life is predestined. I began to view everything in a more detached manner and ceased to seek gain and profit.

[Liao–Fan]: After being selected as an imperial student, I was to attend the university at Beijing. During my year–long stay at the capital, my interest in meditation grew and I often sat silently without giving rise to a single thought. I lost interest in books and did not study at all. Before I was to enter the national university at Nanking, I paid a visit to the enlightened Zen master Yun Gu at Chi–shia Mountain. We sat face to face in the Zen Hall for three days and nights without ever falling asleep. Master Yun Gu questioned me saying:

[Master Yun Gu]: The reason why mundane people are unable to attain sagehood is because they have too many wandering and false thoughts running through their minds. In our three–day meditation, I have not observed the slightest wandering thought arise in you—why is this so?

[Liao–Fan]: I replied, "Mr. Kong has clearly predicted the entire outcome of my life. I have seen that the time of life, death, promotion, and failure are all predestined. There is no use or need for me to think about it or to desire anything. That's why you have not seen me give rise to a single wandering thought." Master Yun Gu laughed and said:

[Master Yun Gu]: I thought you were someone of remarkable capabilities! Now I realize you are nothing but a common mundane person!

[Liao–Fan]: Feeling confused by what he said, I asked the Master to explain. He answered:

[Master Yun Gu]: An average person's mind is forever occupied by his wandering and imaginary thoughts, so naturally their lives are bound by the chi of ying–yang and fate. We cannot deny the fact that fate exists, but only ordinary people are bound by it. Fate cannot bind those who cultivate great kindness, because their virtues accrued from kind acts are so great that these acts will alter their 'original' destiny for the better. The merits accrued can actually change their destiny from suffering to happiness, poverty to prosperity, and short lives to longevity. Similarly, fate cannot bind those who commit great evils. When a person's evil deeds are so great and powerful, they will cancel out the fortune and prosperity predetermined in his original fate, and his life can be transformed from good to bad. For the past twenty years, you have lived your life according to Mr. Kong's predictions and did not do a thing to change it. Instead, you became bound by your own fate. If you're not considered as a mundane mortal, then who is?

[Liao–Fan]: Taken aback, I proceeded to ask Master Yun Gu, "According to you then, is it true that one can change one's fate, that one can escape from it?" The Master answered:

[Master Yun Gu]: Fate is created by ourselves. Good fortune or bad fortune are also determined by ourselves. When I commit evil, disasters are bound to strike. When I cultivate kindness, good fortune will naturally come my way. It says so in all the great ancient books of wisdom. In the Buddhist teachings, it is written that if one wishes and seeks wealth, position, a son, a daughter, or longevity, one can attain them. One only has to cultivate kind deeds in order to escape the control of fate. Since untruthful speech is one of the greatest offenses in Buddhist teachings, we can be assured that these are not lies. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas certainly have no reasons to deceive us.

[Liao–Fan]: I did not quite understand what he meant by 'attaining all that one wished for', and so I asked him, "Mencius once said, 'Whatever is sought for can be attained. The seeking is in oneself.' This refers to inner qualities such as virtue, kindness, and morality. These are all qualities one can work towards. However, when it comes to outside factors such as wealth, fame, and prestige, how can we seek and attain them? Don't these have to be granted by others in order to be achieved? The Master replied:

[Master Yun Gu]: Mencius was correct, but you misinterpreted his meaning. Hui–Neng, the Sixth Patriarch of the Zen school has taught that all the fields of merit are within one's own heart. If one seeks from within, one

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can be in touch with all fortunes and disasters. The outside is merely a reflection of the inside. By seeking within ourselves, we can not only attain the inner qualities of virtue, kindness, and morality, but we can also attain wealth, fame, and prestige.

[Narrator]: If wealth, fame, and prestige are embodied in one's fate, then one will attain them even without having to seek. If they are not, then one cannot attain them even through plotting and scheming.

[Master Yun Gu]: Therefore, if one cannot reflect within his own heart but instead blindly seeks fame, fortune, and longevity from external sources, then this seeking will be in vain. Just as Mencius once said: 'In seeking, one should follow the right path. In attaining, one attains what one's destiny entitles him to.' Whatever is attained in the end is still part of one's own fate. If one tries to seek these qualities from the outside, and even goes to the extent of committing evil deeds for them, then one will not only lose one's inner qualities of virtue and kindness, but predetermined fortune as well. Furthermore, evils committed in one's greedy mind to obtain more will often reduce the fortune of one's original fate. From this we can see that no benefit is derived from blind seeking.

[Liao–Fan]: Master Yun Gu continued to ask:

[Master Yun Gu]: What were Mr. Kung's predictions regarding your entire life?

[Liao–Fan]: I told him in great detail, from the placement positions in the examinations, to my appointment as an official, and finally, the date of my death.

[Master Yun Gu]: Do you feel you deserve imperial appointments or a son?

[Liao–Fan]: I reflected upon my previous deeds and attitudes in the past for a long time. Then I answered him saying, "No, I do not feel I deserve an imperial appointment or a son. Those who receive imperial appointments all have the appearance of good fortune, and I do not. I do not work towards accumulating virtues to build up my fortune, either. I am very impatient, intolerant, undisciplined, and speak without any restraint. I also have a strong sense of pride and arrogance. These are all signs of scant fortune and non–virtue. How is it possible for me to receive an imperial appointment?"

[Narrator]: Next we will see why Liao–Fan has no children. Liking cleanliness is a good thing, but it can become a personality problem if one gets too immaculate. There is an old saying, 'life springs from the dirt of the earth, and water too clean often harbors no fish.'

[Liao–Fan]: The first reason why I feel I do not deserve a son is because I am addicted to cleanliness, resulting in the lack of thoughtfulness for others. The second reason is that 'harmony is the cultivator of all life', but I have a quick temper and easily become angry. The third reason is based on the principle that 'Loving kindness is the basis of reproduction, and harshness is the root of sterility', I overly guard my own reputation and cannot sacrifice anything for the sake of others. The fourth reason is that I talk too much which wastes a lot of chi, or energy. The fifth reason is that I also delight in drinking alcohol, and that depletes my spirit. To remain healthy, one must not sleep during the daytime and stay up through the nights. The sixth reason I do not have a son is my habit of staying up nights, not knowing how to conserve my energy. Aside from these, I have many, many, other faults which are too numerous to mention. Master Yun Gu then said:

[Master Yun Gu]: According to you then, there are too many things in life you do not deserve, not only fame and a son! We should know that both good and bad fortune are all formed from one's heart; a wise person knows that everything one achieves or fails at in life are only consequences of their own actions and thoughts. Only a fool assumes that all is the work of fate and destiny! We must understand that those who have thousands of dollars in this life must have cultivated the fortune worthy of that amount in the past. Those who have hundreds of dollars must also have fortune which is worthy of containing that sum. Those whose fate is to die of starvation, in fact were meant to die in that manner. We must understand that the fate of these people was created by their own past thoughts and actions; the retribution today is simply the fruit of their deeds. Heaven does nothing more than punish evil beings with the suffering they deserve, and reward kind ones with the fortune they deserve.

[Narrator]: The following section is Master Yun Gu's advice to Liao–Fan, using the views of worldly folk, persuading him to cultivate virtue.

[Master Yun Gu]: Bearing children is similar to bearing fruit from seeds; if the seeds are planted well, so will the fruits they bear. If the seeds are not planted well, then the fruits will become malnourished. For example, if a person has accumulated enough merit and virtue for a hundred generations, then he or she will have descendants to last a hundred generations. One who accumulates enough merit and virtue to last ten generations will then have

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ten generations of descendants to live out that fortune. The same goes for three generations or two generations. For those who have no descendants at all, it is because they have not accumulated enough good merit and virtue—they may have amassed sins instead!

[Master Yun Gu]: Now that you recognize your own shortcomings, you can work to change and reform the misdeeds which cause you to not have a son or become an imperial official. You must cultivate virtue, tolerance, and treat others with compassion and harmony. You must also care for your health and conserve your energy and spirit. Live as though everything of the past dissolved yesterday, and all of the future begins today. If you can accomplish this, then you are a person born anew. If even our physical body is governed by the law of fate, then how can a mind of virtue and discipline not evoke a response from heaven? As said in the Tai Ja Chapter in the Chinese Book of History,

[Narrator]: 'One may run from the decrees of heaven, but one can never escape the retribution for one's own evil deeds'. In other words, one can alter the retribution due from past deeds, but if one continues to behave immorally, then there is no chance of avoiding disaster.

[Master Yun Gu]: It is also said in the Book of Poems,

[Narrator]: 'A person should often reflect upon his own thoughts and actions, to see if they accord with the ways of heaven. If one practices such, then fortune will come without being sought. The choice to seek either good fortune or to bring about adversity is all up to you.'

[Master Yun Gu]: Mr. Kong had predicted that you will not receive an imperial appointment or have a son. We can think of these as the decrees of heaven, but even that can still be changed. You only need to reform your ill ways, practice kind deeds and work to accumulate merit and virtue. These are your own transactions to create fortune, no one can take it away. How is it then possible that you will not get to enjoy it? The I Ching, Book of Change, was written to help kind people bring about good fortune and avoid adversity. If everything is predestined with no room for change, how can we improve upon our fortune and avoid adversity? The very first chapter of I Ching also said,

[Narrator]: 'families who often perform kind deeds will have an excess of good fortune to pass onto the next generations.' Do you believe in this?

[Liao–Fan]: I understood and believed in the Master, and paid my respects to him in gratitude. Then I began to repent of all my past wrongdoings, whether large or small, in front of the Buddha image. I wrote down my wish to pass the imperial examinations, and vowed to complete three thousand meritorious deeds to show my gratitude towards heaven, earth, and ancestors. Upon hearing my vow, Master Yun Gu showed me a chart, and taught me how to keep a daily record of the kind and evil acts I committed. He told me that bad deeds could neutralize the merits I accrue from good deeds. The Master also taught me how to recite the Jwun Ti Mantra; it is a way to train my mind for single– minded concentration. Only with a pure and unscattered mind could what I seek for come true. Master Yun Gu then said:

[Master Yun Gu]: You can also learn the proper way to practice the art of written mantras. It is said, "Those who practice the art but do not know the right way to do it will be laughed at by gods and spirits." The secret behind writing mantras is the absence of thought from start to finish. In the process of drawing, one must not give rise to a single improper thought; even kind thoughts have to be let go of. Only under these circumstances can a mantra be successful. When one prays or seeks something in terms of changing fate, it is important that one does it when the mind is still. In this way, wishes will be easily fulfilled.

[Master Yun Gu]: Mencius stated in his Principle of Forming Destiny that there is no difference between longevity and short life. At first glance, one would find this hard to understand—how can longevity and short life be the same? In actuality, when we look within our hearts, we will find no duality, no difference. We should see everything with eyes of equality and live morally regardless of good or bad times. If one can practice accordingly, then one can master the fate of wealth and poverty.

[Master Yun Gu]: Therefore, when we are able to create and form our own destiny, it does not matter whether we are presently rich or poor. Just as a wealthy man should not become careless in his thoughts and actions because he is rich, a poor man should not resort to committing evil deeds due to his poverty. In either case, one should keep to one's place in society and be a virtuous person. If one can practice morality regardless of conditions, then he or she will surely change a poor life into a prosperous one, and a prosperous life into an even longer lasting prosperity.

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[Master Yun Gu]: One should also look upon long life and short life equally. A person who knows he is short-lived should not think, 'I'm going to die soon anyway, so there's no point in being virtuous, I should steal and kill for my benefit while I can.' Instead, one who already knows he has a short life to live should be even more diligent in cultivating kindness, hoping to gain a longer life next time, and perhaps his or her merits from practicing kindness can even elongate the present life. One who is long-lived should not think, 'I have all the time in the world, it doesn't matter if I do some evil once in while.' We should know that longevity does not come easily, and should be cherished and used to cultivate even more kindness and virtue. Otherwise, you may very well use up your longevity all too soon. If you understand this principle, then you will be able to change a short life into a long life through virtuous behavior.

[Master Yun Gu]: The issue of life and death is the most critical issue of one's life. Therefore, long life and short life is also the most important issue to us. The same applies to wealth and poverty, low and high prestige. These are all encompassed by the issue of long life and short life. That is why Mencius did not need to mention the latter in his principle of creating destiny, since he had already spoken about long and short life.

[Liao–Fan]: Master Yun Gu then told me about Mencius's teaching on cultivating the self. He said that one who wishes to cultivate himself must do so day by day, and be mindful of his conduct every moment, ensuring that no transgressions are made. As for changing one's destiny, that depends on the accumulation of merit, seeking for a response from the heavens. When cultivating the self, one should be aware of one's own faults, and resolve to correct them just as in curing a sickness. Perseverance is required, and attainment comes when one's practice matures and ripens. In that case, one's destiny will most definitely change for the better. We should work toward severing all bad habits and thoughts. It would be quite an accomplishment for the true benefits of these teachings to be felt once you reach the state of 'no thought'.

[Master Yun Gu]: The actions of worldly people usually follow their thoughts. Whatever has to be 'thought' is not considered natural. I know that you are still unable to accomplish the state of 'no thought', but if you practice reciting the Jwun Ti Mantra continuously, it will help you to overcome scattered thoughts in the mind. When you recite, you must not think of reciting, but recite consciously and diligently without any attachment. When the reciting becomes second nature to you, it will be efficacious.

[Narrator]: But the essence of this practice can only be understood after you practice it.

[Liao–Fan]: My name used to be Shuei Hai, which meant 'broad learning', but after receiving these teachings from Master Yun Gu, I changed it to Liao Fan, which means 'transcending the mundane'. It signified my understanding of the fact that destiny is created by ourselves, and I did not wish to be like worldly people, who allowed destiny to control them.

[Liao–Fan]: From then on, I began to be constantly aware of my thoughts and actions, and I was very cautious and careful in whatever I did. Soon I felt quite different from before. In the past, I used to be careless and lived my days in distraction, and had no self-discipline at all. Now, I found myself being naturally respectful, careful and conservative in my thoughts, speech, and actions. I maintain this attitude even when I'm alone, for I know that there are spirits and gods everywhere who can see my every action and thought. Even when I encounter people who dislike or slander me, I can take their insults with a patient and peaceful mind, and not feel compelled to quarrel with them.

[Liao–Fan]: The year after I met Master Yun Gu, I took the preliminary imperial exam in which Mr. Kong had predicted I would come in third place. Amazingly, I came in first! Mr. Kong's predictions were beginning to lose their accuracy. He had not predicted I would pass the imperial exam at all, but that autumn, I did! None of these were part of my original destiny. Master Yun Gu had said that destiny could be changed, and now I believe it more than ever!

[Liao–Fan]: Although I had corrected a lot of my faults, I found that I could not wholeheartedly do the things I ought to do. Even if I did do them, it was forced and unnatural. I reflected within and found that there were still many wrongs in my being, such as seeing an opportunity to practice kindness and not being eager enough to do it; or, harboring doubts when helping others in need. Sometimes I forced myself to act kindly, but my speech was still untamed and offensive. I found I could contain myself when sober, but after a few drinks, I would lose self-discipline and act without restraint. Although I often practiced kind deeds and accumulated merits, my faults and offenses were so numerous, they seemed to outnumber my good deeds. A lot of my time was spent vainly and without value. It took me more than ten years to complete the three thousand meritorious deeds I had vowed to

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do.

[Liao–Fan]: I was not able to dedicate the merits from these three thousand kind deeds at a temple until I returned to my hometown in the south a few years later. Then I made my second wish, and that was for a son. I vowed to complete another three thousand good deeds. A few years later, your mother gave birth to you, and named you Tien–chi.

[Liao–Fan]: Every time I performed a kind deed, I would record it in a book. Your mother, who could not read or write, would use a goose feather dipped in ink and make a red circle on the calendar for every kind deed she did. Sometimes she gave food to the poor, or bought living creatures from the marketplace to free in the wild. She recorded all of these with her circles on the calendar. At times she could accumulate more than ten red circles in one day!

[Narrator]: That means she performed more than ten kind deeds in a single day.

[Liao–Fan]: Everyday we practiced like this, and in four years, the three thousand deeds were completed. Once again I made the dedications, this time in our home. On September 13th of that same year, I made my third wish, and that was to pass the next level in the imperial exam, the jin–shr level. I also vowed to complete ten thousand meritorious deeds. After three years, I attained my wish and passed the jin–shr level. I was also made the mayor of Bao–di prefecture. While in that office, I prepared a small booklet to record my merits and faults, and called it the Book of Disciplining the Mind.

[Narrator]: The book was called Disciplining the Mind in hopes of helping him avoid selfish and improper thoughts.

[Liao–Fan]: From that day, I recorded all my good and bad deeds in that booklet, and kept it on my desk. Every evening, I would burn incense and make a report of my deeds to the heavens at the little altar in the garden. Once, your mother was concerned when she saw that I had not accumulated many merits and asked:

[Mother]: In the past, I was able to help you in your accumulation of kind deeds, and we were able to complete the three thousand meritorious deeds. Now, you have made a vow to complete ten thousand kind deeds, and there are fewer opportunities to practice them here at the government residence; how long will it be before your vow can be fulfilled?

[Liao–Fan]: That night, after your mother spoke these words, I dreamed of a heavenly being, and told him of my difficulty in completing the ten thousand kind deeds. The heavenly being said to me:

[Heavenly being]: When you became mayor, you reduced the taxes on the rice fields; that was a great kind deed, and that deed itself was worth ten thousand merits. Your vow is already fulfilled!

[Liao–Fan]: As it turned out, the farmers in Bao–di prefecture had to pay a very high tax, and when I came to office, I reduced the taxes on the rice fields by nearly half. But still, I felt strange...

[Narrator]: How did the heavenly being know about the tax deduction? Liao–Fan still held doubts and wondered how a single deed could be worth ten thousand merits.

[Liao–Fan]: Coincidentally, the Zen Master Huan–yu was traveling from the Five– Plateau Mountains and stopped in Bao–di. I invited him over and told him of my dream, and asked whether it was believable. Master Huan–yu said:

[Master Huan–Yu]: When doing kind deeds, one must be true and sincere, and not seek any rewards, or act with falsity. If one does a kind deed with such a true and sincere heart, then one deed can indeed be worth the merit from ten thousand kind deeds. Besides, your act of reducing the taxes in this prefecture benefits more than ten thousand people; you have relieved the suffering of heavy taxes on all these farmers. The fortune you will gain from this act will surely be great!

[Liao–Fan]: Upon hearing his words, I was overwhelmed with gratitude and immediately gave a month's salary for him to take back to the Five– Plateau Mountains as donation. I asked the Master to use the money to offer food for ten thousand monks and dedicate the merits for me.

[Liao–Fan]: Mr. Kong had predicted that I would die at the age of fifty– three. However, I survived that year with no illnesses though I did not ask the heavens for a longer life. Now I am sixty–nine, and I have lived sixteen more years than what was destined!

[Liao–Fan]: The Chinese Book of History had said:

[Narrator]: 'The way of the Heavens is undetermined, and neither is one's destiny. It is also said that, 'Destiny is not set, but is only created and determined by oneself.'

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[Liao-Fan]: These are all true, and I have come to understand that both fortune and adversity are all results of one's own doings. These are truly the words of sages and saints! If one is to say that fortune and adversity are all determined by the heavens, then I would consider that person to be mundane and common.

[Liao-Fan]: Tien-Chi, my son, I wonder how your life will be? In any case of destiny, we should always prepare for the worst; therefore, even in times of prosperity, you must act as if you were not, and when things are going your way, you must be mindful of adversity. When you are wealthy, be mindful of poverty, and when loved and respected by all, you must remain careful and conservative. When the family is greatly respected and revered, you must carry yourself humbly, and when your learning is broad and deep, you must not display it, but keep it humbly within.

[Narrator]: The six ways of contemplation mentioned above are a means to tackle the problem from its opposite side. If one can thus cultivate the mind, then virtue and morality will grow and fortune will increase on its own.

[Liao-Fan]: When mindful of the past, we should spread the virtues of our ancestors, and when mindful of the present, we should conceal the faults of our own parents. This is what Mencius said as 'Parents caring for children and children caring for parents'. When mindful of the nation, we should think of how we can repay its kindness to us, and when mindful of the family, we should think of how to bring about good fortune. When mindful of the outside, we should think of how to help those in need around us, and when mindful of within, we should prevent wicked thoughts and improper actions from arising.

[Narrator]: These six contemplations are all positive ways to cultivate good character. If one can practice accordingly, one will surely become a true gentleman.

[Liao-Fan]: A person must be able to detect his faults everyday in order to correct them everyday. If you are unable to detect any faults in yourself, then improvement of character is out of the question. There are many intelligent people in the world who refuse to cultivate morality and virtue, and cannot put forth diligent effort in their work. Their failures later in life are owed to a single word: Laziness.

[Liao-Fan]: The teachings which Master Yun Gu taught are truly the most worthy, deep, real, and proper teachings, and I hope you will study them closely and practice them with all your effort. You must use your time wisely and not let it slip by in vain.

The Second Lesson: Ways to Reform

[Narrator]: How can we be free from faults when we were not born as saints or sages? Confucius once said, "One with faults should not fear to correct them." After Liao–fan spoke of the ways to create destiny, he proceeded to tell his son about the three ways to reform. First, one must feel shame, second one must know fear, and third, one must have determination and courage. If we are mindful of correcting even the tiniest mistake, then large wrongdoings would naturally be avoided.

[Narrator]: The Spring–Autumn Period mentioned throughout this book refers to a period in China's history over 2,000 years ago when the country was undergoing great change and turmoil.

[Liao–Fan]: During the Spring–Autumn Period, China was divided into several small nations. Many prestigious advisors and counselors of these nations were able to accurately predict whether a person's future would be good, bad, disastrous or fortunate, based on their observation of that person's speech and behavior. These can all be seen recorded in several history books.

[Liao–Fan]: Usually, there are signs which signal impending danger or of coming good fortune. These signs are a reflection of one's heart; though it is the heart from which thoughts arise, the body and its limbs can fully portray a person's character. For instance, if a person is kind–hearted, then his every gesture would indicate steadiness and solidity. If a person is evil and mean, then his body and limbs would naturally portray a petty and small character. Often a person is more fortunate when he tends toward kindness and invites trouble when he tends toward meanness. Worldly people often do not see what is actually going on, as if their vision was blurred. Since they cannot see reality, they claim that fortune and disasters are unpredictable.

[Liao–Fan]: When a person is absolutely honest and truthful, his heart is in agreement with the heart of heaven. Therefore, when one can use this sincere attitude in treating people and dealing with everyday matters, good fortune will naturally follow. This means that in observing someone, we only need to pay attention to his behavior. If his behavior portrays kindness, then you will know for sure in advance that his good fortune is not far behind. On the contrary, when we see unkind behavior from a person, we will know that troubles await him. If you really want to have good fortune, and stay away from adversity, it is necessary to first reform your faults before practicing kind deeds.

[Liao–Fan]: There are three ways to reform one's faults: First, one must feel shame. Think of all the ancient saints and sages whose names and teachings have lasted through hundreds of generations. They were people just like us, but why is my name tarnished and my reputation ruined in just one lifetime? I find that it is because I over–indulge myself in material pleasures and have been badly influenced by the polluted environment. I also secretly do many things I'm not supposed to do, and think others won't know about it. Sometimes I disregard the nation's laws and am not ashamed of it. Without realizing it, I stoop lower each day until I'm no different from an animal. There is nothing else in the world which calls for more shame and remorse than these behaviors. Mencius once said,

[Mencius]: "Shame" is the greatest and most important word in a person's lifetime. Why? Because one who knows shame, will put forth his best effort in reforming faults and will eventually attain sagehood or become a saint. One who cannot comprehend the word 'shame' will be unrestrained and immoral. This person would then be just like an animal.

[Liao–Fan]: These are really key words to reforming your faults.

[Liao–Fan]: The second way to reform is that one must know fear. What are we to fear? We must know that the heaven, earth, spirits, and gods all hover over our heads in observation. They are different from man in that they can see everything without obstruction. Therefore, it is not easy to deceive them. Even when my wrongdoings are done in a place where nobody is around to witness it, the heaven, earth, spirits and gods are just like a mirror, clearly reflecting all my faults. If my offense is serious, then all kinds of disasters will befall me; if the fault is minor, it will still deduct from my current fortune. How can I not feel fear?

[Liao–Fan]: Every moment, even when I'm in an empty room, the spirits and gods watch over me very carefully and records everything. We can try covering up our evil doings from others, but the spirits and gods can see through to our hearts and know our every action. Ultimately, we cannot deceive ourselves. We would feel

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embarrassed and dishonored if others happened to see our misdeeds. Therefore, how can we not be constantly cautious of our every actions and be fearful of the consequences they might evoke?

[Liao-Fan]: But there's more to it! As long as a person still has one breath left, then he has the chance to repent of the most serious mistakes and offenses.

[Narrator]: Once, a person who behaved badly during his entire lifetime felt remorse just when he was about to die. He had realized his past mistakes and regretted all the bad things he had done. His heart came to a very kind thought, and immediately afterwards, he passed away peacefully.

[Liao-Fan]: This is to say, if a person can have an overwhelming and courageous kind thought at the most important moment, then it can cleanse away hundreds of years of accumulated sins. This is just like how only one lamp is necessary to bring light into a valley that has been dark for a thousand years. Therefore, it does not matter how long one has been sinful, or if the offenses were newly made; he or she is a surpassing person as long as they are able to change!

[Narrator]: Though we make mistakes, it is good to correct them. But don't think it is all right for you to do bad things now because you can always repent later. This is definitely not allowed. If one commits a wrongdoing purposely, then the sin is even greater than before.

[Liao-Fan]: Besides, we are living in a tumultuous and constantly changing world. Our body, being made of flesh and blood is extremely perishable. If our next breath does not come, then this body will no longer be part of us. By then, even if we did want to reform, we would not have the chance to do so.

[Narrator]: Also, when a person dies, he cannot take any worldly possessions with him; for only his karma stays with his spirit.

[Liao-Fan]: Therefore, when you commit evil, your retribution in the physical world is a bad reputation and name which will last for hundreds and thousands of years. Even filial children and loving grandchildren cannot cleanse your name for you. Whereas in your afterlife, you might end up in hell suffering immeasurable pain. Even the saints, sages, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas you may meet cannot save or help you from your consequences. So how can one not be fearful?

[Liao-Fan]: The third way to reform is: one must have determination and courage. A person who hesitates to reform his faults is one who really does not want to change, but is content with what he can get away with. His willpower may not be strong enough, making him afraid to change his wrongdoings. For a reform to take place, one must use all his efforts and resolve to change immediately. One should not doubt or wait to reform one's faults. We should not postpone our resolve to change until tomorrow or the day after. A minor fault is like a thorn sticking into our flesh, and should be quickly removed. A big fault is like a finger bitten by a poisonous snake. We must cut off that finger without hesitation to prevent the poison from spreading and taking our life.

[Liao-Fan]: If a person can follow the three ways of shame, fear, and determination to reform, then his personality will surely be transformed. Just as a thin layer of ice is melted by the sun's rays in springtime, one's faults will also disappear when dealt with through these three ways.

[Liao-Fan]: There are also three methods of practice in helping one reform. First is changing through action; second is changing through reasoning, and third is changing from the heart. Since the methods vary, so do the results of change.

[Narrator]: First let us talk about changing through action.

[Liao-Fan]: For example, if I killed living beings in the past, I now vow not to kill again starting today. If I was angry and yelled at others in the past, I vow not to get angry starting today. This is how a person changes through action, and refrains from repeating a wrongdoing by vowing not to do it again. However, it is a hundred times harder if you force yourself not to do something than if you just stopped doing it naturally. If you do not uproot your faults, but merely suppress them, the faults will eventually resurface even if you have temporarily stopped doing them. Therefore, the method of changing through action cannot help you get rid of your faults permanently.

[Liao-Fan]: Second, let me explain changing through reasoning. A person who tries to reform can refrain from wrongdoings by understanding the reason and principle behind why he should not do it. In the instance of killing, one can reform through contemplating:

[Narrator]: Loving all living things is the virtue of heaven. All living beings love life and are afraid to die. How can I be at peace with myself by taking another's life to nurture my own? At times, animals were even

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cooked alive, such as fish or crabs. They may not have been completely slaughtered before going into the cooking pot. Such pain and suffering reach down into the bones, how can we be so cruel to these animals? When we eat, we use all kinds of expensive and tasty things to nourish our bodies, enough to fill the whole dinner table! But once the meal is done, even the delicacies become body waste and are excreted. The result of our killing accomplishes nothing. We can be nourished just as well by consuming vegetarian foods. Why let your stomach become a graveyard and reduce your fortune through the sin of killing?

[Liao-Fan]: Think again of all the living beings with flesh and blood. Like us, they have a consciousness. We should cultivate virtue and allow these living beings to feel safe around us. How can we continue to harm their lives and make them hate us? If you think about it, you will naturally feel sorrow for these animals and be unable to swallow their flesh.

[Liao-Fan]: Here's another example of change through reasoning. One who often gets angry should stop and think of the fact that everyone has their individual strengths and weaknesses. According to my reasoning, if I touched on someone else's weakness, I should pity him for his weaknesses and forgive his shortcomings. If someone offends me for no reason at all, then it is their problem, and that has nothing to do with me. There is no reason for me to get angry. I can also think:

[Narrator]: There isn't a right minded person who thinks he is always right, for anyone who thinks he is perfect must be a fool. There isn't a learned person who blames another for being knowledgeable, because a truly learned person would be humble, and he will only criticize himself and treat others with tolerance. Therefore, one who complains about others is not a genuine learned person.

[Liao-Fan]: Therefore, when things do not go the way we wish, it is because we haven't cultivated our virtues and morals, and have not accumulated enough merits to move others! We should always reflect upon ourselves first and see whether we have mistreated others. If we practice thus and diligently cultivate this virtue, then adversity and slander can actually become our training ground to refine our character and to fulfill our goals. Therefore, we should be very glad to accept someone else's criticism and teachings. What is there to be angry and complain about?

[Liao-Fan]: Additionally, to remain unmoved by slander is like letting a torch burn itself out in space. If we hear others slandering us and try to defend ourselves, it would be like the spring silkworm spinning its own cocoon. There was an old saying which stated 'one who ties himself in a cocoon is looking for suffering'. Therefore, no benefit but harm is derived from getting angry. There are other faults and offenses we can change along the same lines. If we can understand the reasoning behind the need for reform, we will not make the same mistakes twice.

[Liao-Fan]: Lastly, what is meant by changing from the heart? Though a person's faults can amount to thousands of different types, they all stem from thoughts of the mind. If my heart is still of thoughts, then actions will not arise and faults can be avoided. If your heart is rooted in vices such as desire, fame, profits, or anger, you don't have to find ways to get rid of each fault. All you need is a sincere, kind heart and the willingness to practice kind deeds. As long as your heart is virtuous and kind, then naturally your mind will not generate any improper thoughts.

[Liao-Fan]: All mistakes stem from the heart; therefore, one should change from the heart. It is like getting rid of a poisonous tree. If you want to put an end to it, you must uproot it altogether so it cannot grow again. Why exert yourself to no avail by pulling out its leaves one by one and cutting it twig by twig?

[Liao-Fan]: The best way to reform our faults is through cultivating our hearts. If we are willing to cultivate our hearts, then it is possible to purify our faults right away.

[Narrator]: This is because wrongdoings originate from the heart. Purifying the heart can erase all improper and bad thoughts before they are carried out in action.

[Liao-Fan]: If my heart is pure, I can recognize and stop an evil thought as soon as it arises. The immoral idea will disappear the moment I lay my conscious on it. If I am unable to succeed at reforming a fault through changing the heart, then I will try at the level of understanding, knowing the reasons why I need to make the change. If I cannot succeed with this, then I will try to reform by changing through action and force the thought to dissipate. The best way is by cultivating the heart and understanding the reason behind the need to change. The alternative way is forcing ourselves not to commit the wrongdoing again. Sometimes all three methods have to be used to succeed at reforming a fault. Don't be a fool by dismissing the best way and preferring the alternative way.

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[Liao-Fan]: But even when one vows to change, assistance is needed to truly reform. We will need constant reminders from true friends who are witnesses to our actions in everyday life. As for our good and bad thoughts, we can ask the spirits and gods to be our witness. I practice this by writing down all my faults and reporting them to the heavens, earth, spirits, and gods. You also need to repent sincerely and wholeheartedly from morning to evening without laxity. If one can sincerely repent from one to two weeks, then one to three months, continuing this way, then one will definitely attain results and benefits.

[Narrator]: What are the benefits of repentance? For one, you may feel very much at ease, and your heart will feel light and generous. A dumb person may suddenly become wise, and one can maintain a clear and relaxed mind even in a disturbing and confusing environment. One would also feel a great knowledge for everything. One would be able to drive out all hatred upon seeing an enemy and keep a happy attitude. One may dream of spitting out black things; a sign of expelling improper thoughts and negative energy, leaving the heart much cleaner and purified. One may also dream of the ancient saints or sages who have come to promote and help them, or dream of flying in space without a care in the world. One may also dream of all kinds of colorful flags and ornately decorated canopies. These unusual phenomena are all indications of a successful reform and dissolving of past offenses.

[Liao-Fan]: However, one must not consider seeing these phenomena as a sign of perfection. Instead, one must resolve to further improve the self and put forth greater effort to reform.

[Liao-Fan]: During the Spring-Autumn period of China's history, there was a high senior government official in Wei, named Bwo-yu Chu. When he was twenty, he was already mindful of his past faults. He studied his mistakes and tried to correct them thoroughly. At the age of twenty-one, he felt he still had not completely corrected all his faults. When he was twenty-two, he felt as if twenty-one was spent dreamily, without practical improvement. Thus, year after year, he continued to correct his faults. When he reached fifty, Bwo-yu still felt that the past forty nine years were full of wrongdoings. This was how particular our ancestors were regarding the correction of faults!

[Liao-Fan]: We are all just common people and our mistakes are as numerous as the spines on a porcupine. Oftentimes when we look back, we do not even see our own faults. This is because we are careless, and do not know how to reflect on our own actions. It is as if a cataract is growing in our eye, we become so blind we cannot even see that we're making mistakes everyday!

[Liao-Fan]: There are also indications when people have accumulated too many offenses and sins.

[Narrator]: For instance, one's heart may feel confused and oppressed, lacking energy and spirit. One becomes extremely forgetful, full of worries and feels embarrassed and depressed upon meeting a virtuous gentleman. One becomes displeased at hearing righteous reasoning and when showing kindness to others, is in turn treated with hostility. One will constantly have nightmares where everything is upside-down, and will talk incoherently and behave abnormally. These are the symptoms of those who have accumulated too many sins and offenses!

[Liao-Fan]: If you have any of the above symptoms, you should immediately gather your willpower and reform all faults. It is necessary to form a new life for yourself. I hope you will not delay!

The Third Lesson: The Way to Cultivate Kindness

[Narrator]: The previous chapter spoke about the many ways to correct one's faults in this present life, naturally assuring that a good life will not become a bad one. However, we are still unable to transform a bad life into a good one. Though we may be good and virtuous in this life, we do not know if we committed offenses in past lives. The retribution for past deeds still has to be undergone. Therefore, in order to change a bad life into a good life, we not only have to reform our faults, but also have to practice all forms of kindness and build upon our virtue. Only in this way can we rid ourselves of the karma created in the past. Once the number of our kind practices accumulate, our bad life will naturally turn into a good life; thus, the practice of changing destiny can be proven!

[Liao–Fan]: The I Ching/Book of Change stated:

[Narrator]: "Families who perform kind deeds will accumulate fortune which can outlast many generations".

[Liao–Fan]: Let me give you an example. Once there was a family by the name of Yen. Before they agreed to give their daughter in marriage to the man who later became Confucius' father, they looked into the past deeds of the family. After finding the family to be one that practiced kindness and accumulated virtues, the Yen family felt assured that their daughter would be marrying into a family that would be prosperous with outstanding descendants. Sure enough, their daughter later gave birth to Confucius.

[Liao–Fan]: Confucius had once praised Shwun, an emperor of early China, on his filial piety, saying:

[Confucius]: Due to his great filial piety, Shwun and his ancestors will be known and respected by others. His offspring will be prominent for many, many generations.

[Liao–Fan]: These sayings were later proven true through history. Now I will prove to you in these true stories that merits can be attained through performing kind deeds.

[Liao–Fan]: In Fukien province, there was a prominent man named Rong Yang who held a position in the imperial court as the Emperor's teacher. His ancestors were boat people who made a living by helping people cross the river. Once, there was a storm which lasted so long that fierce flooding washed away all the people's houses. People, animals, and goods were carried down river by the current. Other boaters took advantage of the situation and strove to collect the floating goods. Only Rong Yang's grandfather and great grandfather took interest in rescuing the drowning people. They did not take any of the goods that floated by. The other boaters all laughed and thought them to be very stupid. Later on, when Rong Yang's father was born, the Yang family gradually became wealthy. One day a saint disguised as a Taoist monk came to the Yang family and said:

[Taoist]: Your ancestors have accumulated a lot of merit; your offspring should enjoy wealth and prominence. There is a special place where you can build your ancestral tomb.

[Liao–Fan]: So they followed the Taoist's suggestion and shortly after, Rong Yang was born. Rong Yang passed the imperial examination when he was only twenty years old and later received imperial appointments. The emperor had even bestowed his grandfather and great grandfather with the same imperial honors. His descendants are still very prominent today.

[Liao–Fan]: Zi–cheng Yang from the prefecture of Ninpo, Chehkiang province is another example. Zi–cheng worked as a member in the staff of the prefectural courthouse. He was a kind, humane, and law– abiding man. Once, the prefectural magistrate punished a criminal by beating him until his blood spilled out onto the ground. The magistrate's anger did not subside and as he was about to continue, Zi– cheng knelt and pleaded with him to stop beating the prisoner. The magistrate said:

[Magistrate]: It's all right for you to plead, but how can I not be angry when this person has broken the law!

[Liao–Fan]: Zi–cheng replied:

[Zi–cheng]: When even those in government positions of prestige and power are corrupted and do not follow the Righteous Path, how can one expect the common people to abide by laws and orders? Also, extreme beating can force an innocent suspect to plead guilty. Thus in a case like this we should be more understanding.

[Liao–Fan]: The magistrate was quite touched by Zi–cheng's speech and ceased the beating. Although Zi–cheng came from a very poor family, he never took any bribes. If the prisoners were short of food, he would always take food from his own home even if it meant going hungry himself. This practice of compassion never

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ceased and eventually Zi-cheng had two sons. The elder's name was Shou-chen and the younger was named Shou-zi. Both sons became very prominent, and held important government positions. Even the descendants of the Yang family remained prominent for a long time as well.

[Liao-Fan]: Here is another true story that happened during the Ming Dynasty. Once, an organization of bandits appeared in Fukien Province. The Emperor appointed General Hsieh to lead the imperial army to pacify them. General Hsieh wanted to make sure that the innocent were not accidentally killed in the hunt for bandits. So, he managed to attain a list of those who belonged to the organization and commanded that a white flag be given secretly to those who did not belong with the bandits. They were told to place the flag on their door when the imperial army came to town and the soldiers were ordered not to harm the innocent. With this one thought of kindness, General Hsieh saved tens of thousands of people from being killed. Later, his son Chian Hsieh placed first on the imperial exams and later became an advisor to the emperor. His grandson Pei Hsieh also placed highly on the exams.

[Liao-Fan]: Another example is the Lin family from Fukien. Among their ancestors was an old lady who was very generous. Everyday she made rice balls to give to the poor, and always gave as many as they asked for. There was a Taoist monk who came everyday for three years and each time would ask for six or seven rice balls. The old lady always granted his request and never expressed any displeasure. The Taoist monk, who was actually a heavenly being who came to test the depth of her kind heart, realized the deep sincerity of this woman's kindness and said:

[Taoist]: I have eaten your rice balls for three years with nothing to show my gratitude in return. Perhaps I can help you in this way: On the land behind your house there is a good place where you can build the ancestral grave. If you are placed there in the future, the number of your descendants who will have imperial appointments will be equivalent to the number of seeds in a pound of sesame seeds.

[Liao-Fan]: When the old lady passed away, the Lin family followed the Taoist's suggestion and buried her at the designated place. The first generation after that, nine men passed the imperial exams, and it continued that way for every succeeding generation.

[Liao-Fan]: Another example comes from the father of an imperial historian whose name was Chi Feng. One winter many years ago, Chi Feng's father was on his way to school when he encountered a person frozen in the snow. Finding the man still breathing, he quickly took off his coat to wrap around the frozen man. He carried him back home and revived him. That night he dreamed of a heavenly being who told him:

[Heavenly being]: You helped the dying man out of utter sincerity, this is a great virtue. I will bring the famous General Han-chi of the Sung Dynasty to be reborn as your son.

[Liao-Fan]: Later the child was born and his nickname was Chi.

[Liao-Fan]: Another example is of Ta-jo Ying, the imperial secretary who lived in Tai-chou. When he was young, he used to study in remote mountain areas. At night he often heard the sounds of ghost and spirits but he never feared them. One day he heard a ghost say happily to another ghost:

[Ghost 1]: There's a village woman whose husband left home a long time ago and has not returned. Her in-laws think that their son is dead and are forcing her to remarry. Tomorrow night she is going to commit suicide here, and will replace me so that I can be reborn.

[Narrator]: The souls of those who commit suicide have to wait for another to die at the same place they did in order to leave the ghost realm and attain rebirth at a higher level.

[Liao-Fan]: Mr. Ying heard this and immediately set out to sell his parcel of land. He attained four lians of silver and made up a letter from the daughter-in-law's husband and sent it to her home along with the silver. The father-in-law noticed that the letter was not in his son's handwriting, but examined the silver and said:

[Father-in-law]: The letter may be a fake, but the silver's not. Besides, who would send us this much money? Perhaps our son is truly alive and well, and we should not force our daughter-in-law to remarry.

[Liao-Fan]: Therefore the daughter-in-law did not commit suicide and her husband returned home after all. Mr. Ying heard the ghosts converse again:

[Ghost 1]: Humph! Originally I was able to leave this place for rebirth, but my chance got messed up by Mr. Ying!

[Ghost 2]: Why don't you inflict some harm on him?

[Ghost 1]: No, I can't. His goodness and virtue has been recognized by the gods and he's going to receive a

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prominent position in the future. How can I harm him?

[Liao-Fan]: Mr. Ying heard this and became even more diligent in practicing kindness and accumulating merit. Whenever there was a famine, he would use his own money to buy food for the poor and needy and was always eager to help those in emergencies. When things did not go his way, he always reflected within himself rather than complain of the outside conditions. Even today, his descendants are still very prominent.

[Liao-Fan]: There was another person, Feng-chu Hsu, who lived in Changso, Chiangsu province, whose father was very wealthy. Whenever there was a famine, his father would donate his own grain and all the rent on the rice fields to the poor. One night he heard ghosts singing outside his home:

[Ghosts]: No kidding! No kidding! A person of the Hsu family is going to pass the imperial exam!

[Liao-Fan]: This went on for several days and sure enough, that year his son Feng-chu passed the imperial exam. From then on, he was even more diligent in doing good deeds and accumulating merit. He often fixed bridges and took care of travelers and monks. One day he heard the ghosts sing again:

[Ghosts]: No kidding! No kidding! A person in the Hsu family is going to pass an even higher level on the imperial exam!

[Liao-Fan]: And sure enough, Feng-chu passed the higher exam and became the governor of two provinces.

[Liao-Fan]: Another example is Kung-hsi Tu who lived in Chia-shing, Chehkiang Province. Mr. Tu used to work in the courthouse and would spend nights in the prison cells, talking with the inmates. Whenever he found anyone to be innocent, he would write a classified report to the judge, informing him of innocent cases. The judge would then question the prisoners accordingly and clear the case. Through Mr. Tu's effort, ten innocent people were released, and all of them were extremely grateful to him. Soon after, Mr. Tu also made a report to the Imperial Judge saying:

[Mr. Tu]: If even in the Imperial City there are so many innocent imprisoned, there must be many more throughout the nation. I recommend that the Imperial Judge send investigators to check the prisons for innocent people every five years. The sentences can be reduced or canceled in order to prevent the innocent from remaining in prison.

[Liao-Fan]: The Imperial Judge took his request to the Emperor, who agreed to Mr. Tu's suggestion. Mr. Tu was chosen as one of the special agents in charge of reducing sentences for those who may be innocent. One night he dreamed of a heavenly being who came to him and said:

[Heavenly being]: You were not supposed to deserve a son in this life, but this act of reducing prison sentences for innocent people is in line with the wishes of the heavens. You will be bestowed with three sons and they will all attain high positions.

[Liao-Fan]: Soon after that, his wife gave birth to three sons who all became prominent men in society.

[Liao-Fan]: Another example of attaining good outcomes from practicing kindness is Ping Bao who lived in Chia-shing. Ping was the youngest of the seven sons of the magistrate of Chih-chou, An-hui Province. He was sought into marriage by the Yuan family at Ping-hu Prefecture and was a good friend of my father. Ping Bao was very knowledgeable and talented, but he was never able to pass the exams. He put his time into studying the teachings of Buddhism and Taoism instead. Once, while traveling to Lake Liu, he came to a village and saw a temple in desperate need of repairs. He saw that the statue of Kuan Yin Bodhisattva stood wet from the rain which leaked through the roof. Ping took out all his money and gave it to the abbot of the temple, asking him to please use it to restore the temple. The abbot replied:

[Abbot]: It will be a very big project, I'm afraid this amount is not enough to complete your wish.

[Liao-Fan]: Ping Bao then took out all his luxurious belongings and handed them to the abbot. His servant tried to persuade him into keeping his best outfit, but he refused, saying:

[Ping Bao]: It does not matter to me. As long as the statue of Kuan Yin Bodhisattva remains undamaged, I do not care if I have to go without clothes.

[Liao-Fan]: The abbot, with tears in his eyes, exclaimed:

[Abbot]: To give up money and clothing is not a difficult deed to accomplish, but your deep sincerity is truly rare and precious to encounter!

[Liao-Fan]: After the temple was repaired, Ping Bao led his father over to visit and spent the night there as well. That night, Ping dreamed of the Dharma Protector of the temple, Chie-lan, coming to thank him saying:

[Chie-Lan]: Since you have accumulated these merits and virtues, your children and descendants will enjoy

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having imperial appointments for a long time.

[Liao–Fan]: Later on, his son and grandson both passed high exams and were appointed as imperial officials.

[Liao–Fan]: Another example is a person named Li Zhi from Jia–shan prefecture. His father used to be a clerk in the prefectural courthouse. Once, Li's father came to know about an innocent man who was given the death penalty. He attempted to plead this case with his superior. When the prisoner heard about this, he told his wife:

[Prisoner]: I am so indebted to this man who has spoken on my behalf, and I have no way of showing my gratitude. Will you invite him over to our house and offer yourself in marriage? Perhaps this will please him and increase my chances to live.

[Liao–Fan]: The wife cried as she listened to his request, for she really did not want to do it. But it was the only way she could help her husband in this time of need. So, the next day when the clerk came to visit, she offered him wine and told him of her husband's wishes. The clerk refused the offer of marriage, but continued with great effort to clear the case. When at last the prisoner was released, he and his wife both went to his house to thank him. The man said:

[Man]: One with such virtue as yours is truly rare to encounter these days, how can I show my gratitude? You do not have a son, please allow me to offer my daughter in marriage to you, this is the only way I can repay you. Please accept.

[Liao–Fan]: So the clerk accepted, and soon afterwards, she bore him his son, Li Zhi. Li passed the higher level imperial exam when he was just twenty years old. Li's son Gao, and grandson, Lu, and great grandson Da–lwun all passed high examinations and received imperial appointments.

[Liao–Fan]: The ten examples above all tell of the different deeds cultivated by different people. Although their actions differ, their intent was the same: to do good. If we were to examine goodness closely, we would find that there are many different kinds.

[Narrator]: There is real goodness and false goodness, honest goodness and crooked goodness, hidden goodness and visible goodness, seeming goodness and unseeming goodness, improper goodness and proper goodness, half goodness and full goodness, big goodness and small goodness, and finally, difficult goodness and easy goodness.

[Liao–Fan]: These different types of goodness each have their own reason, which should be carefully learned and understood. If we practice kind deeds but do not learn the way to differentiate between right and wrong, we may end up doing harm instead of good. Now I will explain the different types of goodness one by one.

[Liao–Fan]: What is real goodness and false goodness? Once upon a time in the Yuan Dynasty, a group of scholars went to pay homage to Master Jung Feng on Tian–mu Mountain. They asked:

[Scholar 1]: Buddhist teachings often speak of the retributions for good and evil; they say it's like the shadow, following the body wherever it goes. This is saying that doing good will always have its reward, and doing evil will always have its punishments. Then why is it, that there are people who practice kind deeds, but their family and descendants are not prosperous and successful? On the other hand, there are evil and wicked people who do bad things, but their family and descendants do quite well. Where has the law of cause and effect gone to? Is there no standard in the Buddha's teaching?

[Liao–Fan]: Master Jung Feng answered him, saying:

[Master J.F.]: Common people are blinded by worldly views, they have not cleansed their minds of impurities, and cannot see with true perception. Therefore, they look upon true goodness as evil and mistaken true evil as goodness. This is very common nowadays! Furthermore, these people do not blame themselves for bad perception on their part, but instead blame the heavens for their misfortunes!

[Scholar 2]: Goodness is goodness, and evil is evil; how can they be mistaken for each other?

[Liao–Fan]: Hearing this, Master Jung Feng asked each of them to express their thoughts on what was good and what was evil. One of them said:

[Scholar 3]: To yell at and beat others is evil, to respect and treat others in a mannerly way is good.

[Liao–Fan]: Master Jung Feng answered:

[Master J.F.]: Not necessarily.

[Liao–Fan]: Another scholar said:

[Scholar 4]: Being greedy for wealth and taking another's money is evil, not being greedy and abiding by

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proper ways is good.

[Liao–Fan]: Master Jung Feng said:

[Master J.F.]: Not necessarily.

[Liao–Fan]: The remaining scholars all expressed their own views on what was good and what was evil, but Master Jung Feng still replied:

[Master J.F.]: Not necessarily.

[Liao–Fan]: Since Master Jung Feng disagreed with all of their views on good and evil, they decided to ask the Master himself. They questioned:

[Scholar 1]: So what is really considered good, and what is really considered evil?

[Liao–Fan]: Master Jung Feng told them:

[Master J.F.]: To do things with the intention of bringing benefit to others is good, to do things for the sake of oneself is evil. If what you do is for the sake of benefiting another, then it does not matter if you yell at or beat him, that is still considered good. If your intention is for self–benefit, then regardless of your appearance of respect and courtesy, it is still considered evil. Therefore, when one practices kind deeds with the sole intention of benefiting others, this is considered as benefiting the public, and if it's public, then it is real goodness. If you only think for yourself while doing kind acts, then that is considered private benefit, and that, is false goodness. When kindness springs from within the heart, it is real goodness. When one does good just for the sake of doing a good deed, then it is false. Also, when one does good without expecting anything in return, it is considered real goodness. When one practices kind deeds for some other purpose than to benefit others, it is false. These differences should all be scrutinized by those who wish to practice true kindness.

[Liao–Fan]: What is honest goodness and crooked goodness? People nowadays often look upon a conservative and nice person as a good and kind person. However, the ancient sages and saints have shown that they prefer those who are courageous and hold high goals for themselves.

[Narrator]: This is because those with courage and high goals are easier to teach and guide, and will someday reach accomplishment in life, while those who are overly careful and conservative will never amount to anything.

[Liao–Fan]: As for those who appear to be conservative and careful in their everyday actions, they may be liked by all, but because of their weak personality, they easily go along with everything, unable to think for themselves. Sages often speak of them as thieves of virtue. From this we can see that the viewpoint of common folk greatly differs from that of the saints and sages.

[Narrator]: What common people may view as goodness, the saint in fact proclaims to be evil. What appears to be evil to the common people, the saint perceives as true kindness.

[Liao–Fan]: This applies to other matters as well. Heaven, earth, gods and spirits all look upon good and evil from the same viewpoint as the sages. The kind man finds himself rewarded for his kind deeds, and the wicked man suffers for his evil–doings. Whatever the sages perceive as right, they too see the same way. They do not view things from the same perspective as do commoners. Therefore, those who wish to accumulate merit must not be deceived and affected by the sights and sounds of the world, and should practice with a true and humble heart, not for the purpose of pleasing others and acquiring respect. One must protect one's heart from deviant and impure thoughts.

[Narrator]: Honest goodness comes from the thought to help all others, and crooked goodness arises from the thought of greed in wishing only to please people. In harboring love for others, this is being honest, and in harboring thoughts of hatred and jealousy, this is being crooked. Honest goodness is when one is respectful, and crookedness is when one acts without sincerity.

[Liao–Fan]: These should all be carefully differentiated.

[Liao–Fan]: What is hidden goodness and visible goodness?

[Narrator]: When one does something good and people know about it, it is called visible goodness. When one does something good and no one knows about it, it is called hidden virtue.

[Liao–Fan]: Those with hidden virtues will naturally be known by the heavens and will be rewarded. Those who practice visible goodness are known by people, and they enjoy fame. Fame itself is a fortune, but fame is not favored by heaven and earth, for heaven and earth do not like those who seek fame. We can see that those who have great fame but lack the virtues supporting it will eventually encounter some kind of unthinkable adversity. A person who truly has not done any wrong but continues to be falsely accused by others will have descendants who

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will suddenly become prosperous and successful. From this, we can see how important it is to know the minute differences between hidden and visible goodness. We cannot afford to mistake them!

[Liao–Fan]: In performing good deeds, there is also what seems to be goodness but is actually not, and what does not appear to be goodness but actually is. For example, in the Spring–Autumn Period, there was a country named Lu. Because there were other countries which took their citizens as slaves or servants, the country of Lu made a law which rewarded those who paid the ransom to regain the freedom of their fellow citizens. At that time, Confucius had a very rich student named Dz–gong. Although Dz–gong paid for the ransom to free his people, he did not accept the reward for doing such a deed. He did it out of good intention, seeking only to help others and not for the reward money. But when Confucius heard this, he was very unhappy and scolded him saying:

[Confucius]: You acted wrongly in this matter. When saints and sages undertake anything, they strive to improve the social demeanor, teaching the common folk to be good and decent people. One should not do something just because one feels like it. In the country of Lu, the poor outnumber the wealthy. By refusing the reward, you lead others to think that accepting the reward money is being greedy, thus, all the poor people and others who do not wish to appear greedy will hesitate to pay for ransom in the future. Only very rich people will have a chance to practice this deed. If this happens, no one will pay the ransom to free our people again.

[Liao–Fan]: Another student of Confucius, Dz–lu, once saw a man drowning in the river, and went forth to rescue him. Later, the man thanked him by giving him a cow as a token of gratitude. Dz–lu accepted his gift. Confucius was happy when he heard this, and said:

[Confucius]: In the future, people will be willing and eager to help those who are drowning in deep waters or lakes.

[Liao–Fan]: If we look from the view of common people, Dz–gong, who did not accept the reward money, was good; and Dz–lu, who accepted the cow was not as good. Who would have known that Confucius praised Dz–lu instead and scolded Dz–gong? From this we can see that those who practice kind deeds must not only look at the present outcome, but should also consider the act's effect in the long run. One should not only consider one's own gain and loss, but should look to see the impact made on the public. What we do right now may be good, but with passing years it may inflict harm upon others. Therefore, what seems like goodness may in fact be the opposite, and what appears to be the opposite of goodness, may someday turn out to be goodness done after all.

[Liao–Fan]: There are other examples of what appears to be goodness but actually is not. For example:

[Narrator]: There are many things that people ought to do, but sometimes these things prove to be better left undone. Forgiveness is a virtue, but it cannot be used without reason and wisdom. If we easily forgive and release a criminal when he has not repented and reformed, we may be letting loose a threat to society, causing more harm than good. In this case, forgiveness would be improper, and the man would be best left in his cell.

[Liao–Fan]: Everyone ought to have manners, but they should be carried out with good measure. Overdoing your courtesy to others can result in making them proud and arrogant. In this case, it would not be a good thing. Keeping to one's word is a virtue, but if one causes bigger trouble through keeping a small promise, then that would be considered improper also. Being loving and compassionate is a wonderful trait, but if compassion is carried out by allowing anything to be done, then the spoiled person would be daring and unrestrained, causing greater harm and trouble in the future. This would be most unmerciful. These are all examples of what appears to be goodness but actually is not, and should be thoroughly contemplated.

[Liao–Fan]: What is improper goodness and proper goodness? In the Ming Dynasty, there once was a prime minister named Wen–yi Lyu, who was a just and lawful man. When he grew old, he retired to his hometown where he was loved and respected by all the people. Once, a drunken villager went to his home and proceeded to insult him. Mr. Lyu was not angered by his words but instead told his servant:

[Mr. Lyu]: This man is drunk; let's not give him a hard time.

[Liao–Fan]: With this, he closed the door and ignored the onslaught of insults. A year later, the same man committed a grave crime and was sent to jail with the death sentence. Upon hearing this, Mr. Lyu said with great remorse:

[Mr. Lyu]: If I had taken him to the authorities for punishment that day when he came to insult me, perhaps this would not have happened. A little discipline then could have prevented the great harm done now, and might

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have saved him from certain death. At that time, I was only thinking of being kind, and unknowingly nurtured a daring and outrageous character. Since nothing came from his deed of insulting a prime minister, he grew bold and went on committing the crimes which later brought him the death penalty.

[Liao–Fan]: This is an example of doing something bad while having good intentions.

[Liao–Fan]: There is also an example of those who did good when they in fact intended otherwise. Once, a famine ravished the land, and people stole food from others in broad daylight. A rich family reported their stolen losses from the marketplace to the authorities, but the government did not want to get involved, and did nothing to stop the people. Eventually, the people grew more daring and chaos was imminent. So, the rich family took the law into their own hands and proceeded to catch and punish those who stole from them. In this way, peace returned to the land and the people stole no more from one another. It was with selfish intentions that the rich family acted, but the result of their deeds actually did everyone a great benefit. Therefore, we all know that goodness is proper, and evil is improper; but remember that there are cases where deeds done out of good intention resulted in evil, and deeds done with evil intentions resulted in good.

[Narrator]: This is saying that although the intention was proper, it resulted in the improper, and can only be said as the 'improper within the proper'. However, there is also the case when the improper was intended but resulted in the proper. This is called the 'proper within the improper'.

[Liao–Fan]: Everyone ought to know and understand this.

[Liao–Fan]: What is half goodness and full goodness? In the I Ching, Book of Change it is said:

[Narrator]: When a person does not accumulate kind deeds, he or she will not attain good fortune. When one does not accumulate evil deeds, he or she will not bring about great adversity.

[Liao–Fan]: The accumulation of kind and evil deeds greatly determines our future. If we are diligent in doing kind deeds, it is like collecting things in a container, and with diligence, it will soon be full, and we will have our reward of good fortune. If we are eager in the accumulation of evil deeds and gather that with great diligence, then the container of evil will soon be full and disasters will surely befall. If we are somewhat lazy in our collecting, either in kindness or evil, then the container will be left half filled, and neither good fortune nor adversity will come swiftly. This is one explanation of half goodness and full goodness.

[Liao–Fan]: Once there was a poor lady who went to visit a Buddhist temple, and wished to make a donation. However, she was so poor that she had only two cents, so she gave these to a monk. To her surprise, the temple's abbot himself came forth to help her repent for past offenses and dedicate her merits in front of the Buddha. Later on, the same lady was chosen to enter the imperial palace and became a concubine to the emperor. Clad in her riches, the lady once again went to the temple to donate, this time bringing thousands of silver pieces to give. To her dismay, the abbot only sent his disciple to help her dedicate her merits. The lady did not understand, and so questioned the abbot:

[Lady]: In the past, I only gave two cents in donation, and the Abbot personally helped me repent; today I come with great wealth to give, and the Abbot will not help me perform my dedication, why is it so?

[Liao–Fan]: The abbot answered her saying:

[Abbot]: Though the money you gave in the past was scant, it came from a true and sincere heart, and it was necessary for me to repay your sincerity by personally performing your dedications. Today, although your donation is manifold more, the heart of giving is not quite as true and sincere as before. Therefore, it is fitting and enough that my disciple perform your dedications for you.

[Liao–Fan]: This is the example of how thousands of silver pieces are only considered as half goodness, and two cents as full.

[Liao–Fan]: Another example is of Li Jung, an immortal of the Han Dynasty. He was teaching his student, Dong–bing Lyu, the art of transforming steel into gold. They would use this gold to help the poor. Dong–bing asked his teacher:

[Dong–bing]: Will the gold ever change back to steel again?

[Liao–Fan]: Li Jung answered him saying:

[Li Jung]: After five hundred years, it will return to its original form.

[Liao–Fan]: Dong–bing then said:

[Mr. Lyu]: In this case, I don't want to learn this art, it will harm those who possess the gold five hundred years from now.

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[Liao-Fan]: In actuality, Li Jung was only testing the goodness of his student's heart, and happy with the results, he said:

[Li Jung]: To become an immortal, one must complete three thousand virtuous deeds. What you have just said came from a truly kind heart: your three thousand deeds are fulfilled!

[Liao-Fan]: This was another example of half goodness and whole goodness.

[Liao-Fan]: When we perform a kind deed, it is best if we can do it out of our innermost sincerity, not seeking rewards or noting in our minds how much we have done. If we practice thus, then all our good deeds will reach fulfillment and success. If, instead, we always think of the deeds we have performed, looking for a reward of some kind, then no matter how diligently we practice in an entire lifetime, the deeds will still be considered as half goodness.

[Narrator]: For example, when we donate money to the poor, we can practice what is called 'pure donation'. In this type of giving, we do not linger on the thought of 'I', who is giving; or dwell on the importance of the object I am giving away; or think of who the receiver is. We are simply giving, and it is out of true sincerity and respect. When we give with 'pure donation', then one dou of rice can bring boundless fortune, and the merit from giving one cent can wipe away the sins from a thousand kalpas.

[Liao-Fan]: If we always keep in mind the good we have done, and expect rewards for our actions, then even a donation of two hundred thousand gold pieces would still not bear us the reward of a fully good fortune. This is another way of explaining half goodness and full goodness.

[Liao-Fan]: What is big goodness and small goodness? Once there was a high ranking official named Jung-da Wei, who was led into the spirit world to be judged for his good and bad deeds. The judge there ordered for his records of good and evil to be brought out. When the records arrived, Jung-da was astounded at the courtyard full of his bad records, and at the single scroll which contained his good deeds. The official then ordered for the two to be weighed on the scale. Surprisingly, the bad records which had filled the courtyard were lighter than the single scroll of good deeds, which was only as thin as a chopstick. Jung-da asked the judge:

[Jung-da]: I'm barely forty years old, how could I have committed so many wrongdoings?

[Liao-Fan]: The judge answered him, saying:

[Judge]: When you give rise to a single thought that is improper, it is considered a bad offense there and then, it does not have to be carried out through action to be counted as a wrong. For example, when you see a pretty lady and give rise to improper thoughts, that is considered an offense.

[Liao-Fan]: Jung-da then asked him what was recorded in the single scroll of good deeds which outweighed the evil deeds. The judge replied:

[Judge]: Once the Emperor planned to build a great stone bridge, and you proposed against the project due to the hardship and toil it would cause the tens and thousands of people needed for the work. This is a copy of your proposal to the Emperor.

[Liao-Fan]: Jung-da said:

[Jung-da]: I did make the proposal, but the Emperor dismissed it and began the project anyway. My proposal had no effect on the matter at all, how can it bear so much weight against my numerous offenses?

[Liao-Fan]: The judge replied:

[Judge]: Although the Emperor did not take your suggestion, that one thought of kindness you bore for the tens and thousands of people was very great. If the Emperor had listened to you, then the good performed would be even greater.

[Liao-Fan]: Therefore, when one is determined to do good for the benefit of all people, then a small deed can reap great merits. If one thinks only about benefiting oneself, then even if many deeds of kindness are performed, the merit would still be small.

[Liao-Fan]: What is difficult goodness and easy goodness? The knowledgeable scholars of the past used to say:

[Scholar]: When one wishes to conquer one's greed and desires, one should start with the most difficult to overcome.

[Liao-Fan]: Fan-chr, a student of Confucius, once asked his teacher how to cultivate one's humanity to its fullest. Confucius replied, "Start with what's most difficult to practice". What Confucius meant by the most difficult, was to sever the selfish mind, and one should practice that by conquering what is most difficult for

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oneself to conquer. We should practice like the old teacher, Mr. Su of Chiangshi, who gave two years worth of salary to a poor family who owed money to the government. Thus he saved them from being torn apart should the husband be taken to prison.

[Liao-Fan]: Another example is Mr. Jang from Her-bei:

[Narrator]: Mr. Jang saw an extremely poor man who had to mortgage his wife and child, and had no money for their redemption. If he was unable to pay for their return, the mother and child could both lose their lives.

[Liao-Fan]: Therefore, Mr. Jang gave his ten years of savings to the poor man so the family could be reunited.

[Narrator]: Such examples as Mr. Su and Mr. Jang are rare, for they have given what is most difficult to give, and what others could not sacrifice, they did so willingly.

[Liao-Fan]: Another example is Mr. Jin from Chiangsu Province. He was old and without any sons, so his neighbor offered their young daughter in marriage to him, to give him descendants to carry on his lineage. But Mr. Jin could not bear to ruin the otherwise bright and long future of this young girl, and so refused the offer and sent her back home.

[Narrator]: This is another example of being able to overcome what is most difficult to conquer in oneself. Therefore, the heavens showered down fortune which was especially good for these three old men.

[Liao-Fan]: It is easier to accumulate merit and virtue for those who have money and power than for those who are poor. But if one refuses to cultivate kindness even when it's easy and when one has the chance to do so, then it would truly be a shame. For those who are poor and without prestige, doing kind things for others is a great difficulty; but if in this difficulty one can still manage to help others, then it is a great virtue, and the merits gained would be boundless.

[Liao-Fan]: In being a moral person and dealing with affairs, we should help others whenever the opportunity presents itself. You should know that helping others is not such an easy task, and that there are many ways to do it. In short, the ways of helping others can be simplified into ten important categories. The first is 'supporting the practice of kindness':

[Narrator]: When we see people trying to do a little kindness, we should assist them in their deeds and help their kindness grow. When we see others who wish to do good but cannot accomplish it on their own, we should lend a hand and help them succeed. This is the way we can cultivate 'supporting the practice of kindness':

[Liao-Fan]: The second category is 'harboring love and respect':

[Narrator]: We should harbor respect towards those who are more knowledgeable, older, or of higher status than we are. For those who are younger, less fortunate, or of lower status, we should harbor a mind of loving care.

[Liao-Fan]: The third category is 'helping others succeed':

[Narrator]: When we see a person who is considering whether or not to do a good deed, we should persuade him to put all his effort into doing it. When others meet with difficulties in practicing kindness, we should help think of ways to overcome the difficulty and guide them to success. We must not be jealous at the accomplishments of others, nor try to sabotage their good acts.

[Liao-Fan]: The fourth category is 'persuading others to practice kindness':

[Narrator]: When we meet a person who is doing evil, we should tell him that doing evil will only result in great suffering and painful retribution, and that he should avoid doing so at all costs. We should tell people who refuse to practice kindness or are only willing to practice a little kindness, that doing kind deeds will definitely have its rewards, and that kindness not only has to be cultivated, but must be cultivated constantly and on a large scale.

[Liao-Fan]: The fifth category is 'helping those in desperate need':

[Narrator]: Most people tend to give when there is no need to give and refuse to give when there really is a need. When we meet people who are in great difficulties, emergencies, or dangers, we should lend them a hand and help in whatever way we can to bring them out of their difficult times. The merits accrued from helping others in times of desperate need are boundless indeed. However, one should not become proud and conceited for doing such deeds.

[Liao-Fan]: The sixth category is 'developing public projects for the greater benefit of the people':

[Narrator]: Projects which will bring great benefit to the public usually have to be performed by those with great influence and power. If a person has this capacity, such as rebuilding the water system or assisting a disaster

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area, then he ought to do it for the benefit of the general public. Those without such influence and power can do great deeds, too. For example, when one sees a small leak in the dam, one can use pebbles and dirt to stop the water and prevent disastrous flooding. Though this act may be small, the effect will not go unnoticed.

[Liao-Fan]: The seventh category is 'giving through donation':

[Narrator]: People of this world love, seek, and even die for money. Who is actually willing to help others by giving their own money away? When we recognize the difficulty involved in donation, we can come to appreciate the rarity of the man who is willing to give for the purpose of helping others in need. He is an even greater man in the eyes of the poor. According to the law of cause and effect, 'those who give will in turn receive', and 'those who refuse to give will not receive'. When we cultivate one share of kindness, we will receive one share of fortune, there is no need to worry about having nothing left when we give to help others.

[Liao-Fan]: The eighth category is 'protecting the proper teachings':

[Narrator]: This is referring to the teachings of different religions. We must be able to differentiate between proper religions and deviant religions, and between proper teachings and deviant teachings. The teachings of deviant religions do great harm to people's minds and hearts, and naturally should be abolished. On the other hand, teachings with proper wisdom and views, such as that of Buddhism, which promotes kindness and goodness in society, should be supported. If one happens to see others in the act of destroying such proper teachings, one must put forth a complete effort to protect and uphold these teachings.

[Liao-Fan]: The ninth category is 'respecting our elders':

[Narrator]: Anyone who is deeply learned, knowledgeable, has high prestige, or is older than us is considered to be an elder, and should be highly regarded and respected.

[Liao-Fan]: The tenth category is 'loving and cherishing all living things':

[Narrator]: We should feel sympathy for all living creatures, even the tiny ants, who know of suffering and are afraid to die. How can we kill and eat living beings and not feel the least sorry? Some people even say that these things were meant for human consumption, but there is no logic in this argument, and it is only an excuse for those who desire meat.

[Liao-Fan]: I have only explained the above ten categories in summary, now I will explain each in detail and example:

[Liao-Fan]: What is meant by "supporting the practice of kindness"? In the Yu Dynasty, there once was an emperor by the name of Shwun. One day, before he became emperor, Shwun was watching some fishermen on Lake Lei-ze. He noticed that all the younger and stronger fishermen took the spots where the water was deep and the fish were abundant, while the older and weaker fishermen were left with the rapids and shallow water, where there were very few fish. When Shwun saw this situation, he felt sympathy for the older and weaker fishermen, and thought of a way turn the situation around. He decided to join in the fishing party to set an example for the others. Whenever he saw fishermen plunder good fishing spots, he would conceal their faults and never even spoke of that their selfishness. When he saw those who were humble and yielding, he praised them everywhere he went and even followed their humble and polite ways. Shwun stayed and fished like this for a whole year until the other fishermen got into the habit of yielding good fishing spots to others.

[Narrator]: This story of Shwun is only an example to show how a person influences others through his actions, and not through his speech. It is not meant to encourage people to fish, because fishing is an act of killing. Please refrain from sports which take the lives of others.

[Liao-Fan]: A wise and intelligent man such as Shwun could have easily influenced others with a few words of advice. Why didn't he just say something instead of personally joining the gathering? You should understand that Shwun didn't want to use words, but preferred to set an example for others through his own actions. Shwun wanted those fishermen to feel ashamed of their own selfish behavior and change on their own accord. This really shows how deep and sincere Shwun's wish was for others to practice kindness.

[Liao-Fan]: In today's era of low morality, social breakdown, and loss of proper thinking, it is most difficult to find a good standard of behavior. Therefore, when those around us have shortcomings, we should not use our good points to highlight their deficiencies. When the other person is unkind, we should not use our kindness to measure or compare ourselves to them. When others are not as capable as we are, we should not purposely surpass them with our abilities. Even when we are intelligent and competent, these skills should be kept hidden and not boasted of. Instead, we should behave even more humbly than ever. We should look upon our skills and

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abilities as unimportant, false, and unreal. When someone makes a mistake, we should tolerate it and conceal it, giving them a chance to reform without losing their self–respect. When we let the person keep his dignity, he will be even more careful of his actions in the future. When we see strengths and kindness in others, we should learn from them, praise them, and make their goodness known to others. In daily life, we should refrain from speaking and acting with selfish intentions, but instead seek to benefit society and the public. We can make beneficial laws and regulations for the public to follow. These are the qualities of a great man, since he thinks of the public welfare as more important than his own.

[Liao–Fan]: What is meant by "harboring love and respect for others"? Sometimes it is hard to tell from appearance whether a person is a gentleman or a scoundrel, since scoundrels can pretend to be gentlemen. The difference lies in their intentions: A gentleman's intentions are good, and a scoundrel's intentions are wicked. There is a great distance between the two, and they are as different as black and white. Mencius has said,

[Mencius]: The difference between gentlemen and common people lies in their intentions.

[Liao–Fan]: A gentleman's heart is only filled with love and respect for others. There are thousands of different types of people in this world, some close to us, some strangers, some in high class and some in low, some smart while others are not, and some virtuous and some sinful, but nevertheless, they are our fellow mankind. They are like us, alive in flesh and blood, and they have feelings. There isn't a single person whom I should hate and disrespect. When your hearts are full of love and respect for others, it is the same as if your heart is full of love and respect for the saints and sages. When you understand others, it is the same as if you understand the saints and sages. Why?

[Narrator]: Because all the saints and sages want the people on this earth to lead happy, productive lives.

[Liao–Fan]: Therefore, if we can love and respect people and make them peaceful and happy, we are doing the job of a saint or sage.

[Liao–Fan]: What is meant by "helping others to succeed"? If we cast away raw jade, then this stone would be like any other worthless stone. But if we were to carve and polish it, it could be transformed into a priceless jewel. It is the same with people. A person needs to be taught and guided, just as a jade needs to be carved and polished. When we see someone whom we feel has good potentials doing a good deed or working towards a proper goal, we should guide, support, praise, and encourage him, helping him succeed in his endeavors. If he is ever wrongly accused by another, you should try to clear his name and share his burden of slander. Only when you have helped him stand on his feet and be a part of good society would you have fulfilled your share of responsibility in helping others to succeed.

[Liao–Fan]: Most people dislike those who are different from them, such as a scoundrel versus a gentleman, and a bad person versus a good person. In villages, there are usually more bad people than virtuous ones. Since there are always more bad people around, a good person is often being taken advantage of; therefore a good person often has a hard time standing on his own. Frankness and modesty are the usual characteristics of good people, they do not care much for their appearance. On the other hand, an average uneducated person often only pays attention to another's outer appearance. They like to gossip and make accusations; so, striving to do good turns out to be quite a challenge. A good person can easily be wrongly accused. When this happens, it is entirely up to the goodness and virtue of an elder to correct the actions of those who are bad and guide them back to the right track. It is also up to these elders to protect and help those who are good and need to stand on their own. The highest merit is achieved by those who can preserve good and rid evil.

[Liao–Fan]: What is meant by "persuading others to practice kindness"? As humans, we all have a conscience, but chasing after wealth and fame has kept us constantly busy and forgetful of our good conscience. We have become willing to stoop very low as long there is something to be gained from it. When a friend is about to ignore his good conscience to do something unworthy, we must remind and warn him, hoping to wake him from his muddled state of mind. It is like waking up someone when they're having a nightmare, it is up to us shake them into reality. When a person is undergoing a long spell of depression, we have to pull him out of it and help him clear his mind. You are most virtuous if you can treat your friends with such kindness. A scholar named Han once said:

[Scholar Han]: By word of mouth, one can only persuade and influence another momentarily. It is easily forgotten with the passing of time and events. No one else would have heard what you have said. If you can persuade and influence others through written works, your words can be passed on for hundreds of generations

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around the world. Therefore, writing to promote virtue is an act of great speech, and is a most virtuous deed.

[Liao-Fan]: Here we talked about how we can persuade others by word of mouth and by writing books to promote virtue. Compared with the previous category of helping others to succeed, this is much more direct and obvious. However, the treatment of an illness with the right medicine sometimes proves to have special effects; therefore, we should not give up. It is also important how we do it. For instance, if a person is too stubborn, you should not persuade him with words. If you do, then you are wasting both your words and energy. If a person is gentle and willing to listen, but you fail to persuade him, then you have just missed a golden opportunity to do good. Either way is because you are not wise enough to tell the difference. You should then reflect to see what you did wrong so next time you will do it right and won't waste any more words or lose another opportunity.

[Liao-Fan]: What is meant by "helping those in desperate need"? During one's lifetime, a person often will suffer from serious problems, financial troubles, or separation from loved ones. If we meet someone like that, we should help that person as if we are the one who is experiencing the suffering. We should immediately come to his aid. If a person has been wrongly accused or convicted, we should plead for this person's innocence as well as aid him in any way we can. Scholar Suai once said,

[Scholar Suai]: It does not matter whether a favor is big or small; what counts is that it's done at a time when others need it most.

[Liao-Fan]: What humane words!

[Liao-Fan]: What is meant by "developing public projects for the greater benefit of the people"? Small construction works are needed for villages and big construction jobs are needed for cities. Public projects are anything that needs to be constructed for the public welfare, such as: irrigation systems for farm lands, dams, bridges, or giving food and water to those who are hungry or thirsty. Whenever you have the opportunity, you need to persuade others to put out their share of effort as well. Even when others slander or talk behind your back, you should not be deterred. Don't be afraid of what others might say about you, and don't get scared when the job gets tough. You should not let people's jealousy and hatred shake your resolve to do kind deeds.

[Liao-Fan]: What is meant by "giving through donation"? In Buddhism, giving is considered foremost in all practices of kindness. When one truly understands the meaning of giving and is willing to give away all his worldly belongings, even to the point of donating parts from his own body, then he is walking the way of the Buddha. A person who understands this principle would be willing to give away anything, even to the point of donating his eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. For instance, in a past life, Shakyamuni Buddha offered his own body as food for a hungry tiger. One can also give away the sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharma. There is nothing a person cannot give away if he or she's willing. If a person can do this, then he is on his way to gaining purity of mind and body. He will have no worries or afflictions, just like the Buddha. When we find ourselves unable to give away everything, we can start by donating money. Worldly people treat their clothing and food as dearly as their lives. Therefore, monetary donation is most important for them. When we practice giving without hesitation, we can cure miserliness and at the same time help others in need. However, it is not an easy thing to do. It's a difficult task at first, but will become natural the more we give. From cultivating giving, peace of mind can be attained, and then there is nothing you cannot give away. This is the best way to cure a bad case of selfishness and an opportunity to change our attitudes toward money and worldly possessions.

[Liao-Fan]: What is meant by "protecting the proper teachings"? For millions of years, the proper teachings of religion has been a standard of truth and a spiritual guide for all living beings. If we don't have good doctrines, how can we join in and support the interplay of heaven and earth? How can people of all walks of life succeed in their endeavors without a standard to live by? How would we be able to escape from delusion and life's bondages? How would we create and arrange worldly affairs and transcend the cycle of birth and death? These all depend on good and proper teachings as the lighted path. Therefore, whenever you see temples, memorials of past saints or sages, pictures of sages, or Buddhist texts, you should be respectful. If they are in need of repair, you should repair and put them back in order. We should especially tell people about the teachings of Buddha and widely spread the proper teachings. We should let others know of its value, in this way we are also showing our gratitude towards the Buddhas and sages. We need to do all we can to make this goal come true.

[Liao-Fan]: What is meant by "respecting our elders"? We should make an extra effort in showing our attention and respect towards parents, elder siblings, the governor, our superiors, or any elders of high virtue, prestige, and learning. When taking care of parents at home, we should do it with love in our hearts and a gentle,

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accommodating appearance. We should not raise our voice but maintain a peaceful bearing. As we cultivate these virtues, they will become a part of us, and we will change into a mild–mannered person. This is the way we can touch the hearts of heaven and evoke a response. When carrying out deeds for our superiors or the government, we should follow the rules even when we aren't obliged to. We shouldn't try to slack off just because our superiors don't know what we are doing. Before we convict someone of a crime, regardless of whether the crime is serious or not, we should investigate carefully and handle the case with justice. We should not abuse the power and rights given to us by our superiors.

[Narrator]: When you face the emperor, you should respect him with the same respect as if you were facing the heavens. This is the correct behavior handed down from our ancestors. It has a direct and important effect on your hidden goodness.

[Liao–Fan]: Look at all the families who practiced loyalty and filial piety. Their descendants prosper for a long time and have bright futures. Therefore, we should follow their example and practice with caution.

[Liao–Fan]: What is meant by "loving and cherishing all living things"? We should know that a heart of compassion is what makes a man. Mencius once said:

[Mencius]: A man is not human if he does not feel compassion.

[Liao–Fan]: A person in search of the virtue of mercy and kindness looks out for his heart of compassion. A person who wants to accumulate merits also cultivates a compassionate heart. A person with compassion is a kind, virtuous, and merciful person, while one without compassion for others is unkind and without morals. It stated in The Ethical Code of the Chu Dynasty :

[Narrator]: In January, when most animals are bearing young, female species are not to be used for sacrificial purposes.

[Liao–Fan]: Mencius once said:

[Narrator]: A gentleman will not live near the kitchen.

[Liao–Fan]: This is to protect a compassionate heart, since a lot of slaughtering is done in the kitchen. Therefore, our forefathers did not eat meat under four circumstances: First is if they heard the killing, second is if they saw the killing, third is if the animal was raised by them, and fourth is if the animal was killed for their sake. If you are not vegetarian but wish to cultivate compassion, then you can learn from our ancestors by eating less meat.

[Narrator]: According to the Buddha's teachings, living beings are born as animals as a result of having accumulated bad karma in their previous lives. After they pay their dues in retribution, they can be born as humans again. If they are willing to cultivate as a man, they can even become Buddhas. The meat I eat today may be the flesh of a future Buddha. The animal we see today may have been a man in previous lives. It is then possible that this animal was my parent, wife, son, relatives or friends. Presently, I am human and they are animals. To kill and eat them would be making enemies of those I used to love. If I eat them today, perhaps in the future they will become human again while I become an animal due to my sins of killing. In their revenge, I will have to undergo the same suffering of being killed and eaten. When we think thus, how dare we kill? How can we swallow a morsel of that flesh? Besides, even if the meat does taste good, the taste only lasts from the mouth to the throat. After we swallow, there is nothing left to taste. There is no difference between eating meat and vegetables, why would you want to kill when there's no good behind it?

[Liao–Fan]: Even if you cannot quit eating meat altogether, you should still try to gradually reduce your meat intake until vegetarianism is accomplished. In this way, you can reach a higher state of compassion within your heart. We should refrain from killing any living creature, even insects. Man makes silk from the cocoons of silkworms. The cocoons have to be boiled in water first, with the silkworms inside. Think about it, how many silkworms lose their lives in the process? When we cultivate the land for farming, how many insects have to be killed? Are you aware of the cost of lives involved in our everyday food and clothing? We kill to support ourselves. Therefore, we should be conservative and cherish the food and clothing we have. To waste them would create the same sin as killing. How often have we unknowingly harmed or stepped on a living creature? With a little awareness, we can prevent this from happening. Tung–pwo Su, a great poet from the Sung Dynasty once wrote:

[Narrator]: 'In love of the mice, we often leave him some rice; In pitying the moth, we won't light the lamp.'

[Liao–Fan]: What a kind and compassionate statement!

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[Liao-Fan]: There are infinite types of goodness, I cannot mention them all. As long as you can expand on the ten previous categories, you can make them into a multitude of good deeds and virtues.

The Fourth Lesson: The Benefit of the Virtue of Humility

[Narrator]: The third lesson taught us the ways to accumulate kind deeds. Naturally, it would be best if people would practice kindness, but as humans, we are social beings. It is impossible to not come in contact with others in society; therefore, it is important to know the ways to improve our persons in dealing with others. The best way to do this is to follow the virtue of humility. A humble person in society receives support and trust from the general public. If a person understands the virtue of humility, he is the person who also understands the importance of constant self improvement. This constant self improvement not only includes the search for higher knowledge, but also encompasses the need to be more humane, better performance in daily duties, and improved communication with friends. Many benefits and rewards result from behaving with an understanding of humility. This lesson focuses on the benefits of virtue and humility, proven by Liao–Fan's own experiences. You will be greatly benefited if you can thoroughly contemplate and understand these teachings.

[Liao–Fan]: In the I Ching/Book of Change, the hexagram of Humility stated,

[Narrator]: The law of heaven takes from those who are arrogant and benefits those who are humble. The law of earth will not allow those who are conceited or self–content to always remain that way, but will bring change upon them. The humble will not wither, but shall be replenished, just as flowing water fills up lower places on the ground as it passes by, making up the differences. The law of spirits and gods bring harm to those who are arrogant and fortune to those who are humble. Even the laws of men despise the arrogant and like the humble.

[Liao–Fan]: Therefore, heaven, earth, spirits, gods, and people all prefer humility over arrogance. In the I Ching/Book of Change, the sixty four hexagrams talk about the constant changes and interactions of heaven and earth, ying and yang. The book teaches a person how to become more humane. Every hexagram contains both good and bad outcomes. The bad outcomes of a hexagram warn people to stop doing evil and to practice kind deeds. The good outcomes of a hexagram encourages people to diligently improve themselves and strive to be better. Only the Humility hexagram contains all good outcomes and no bad outcomes. The Chinese Book of History has also said,

[Narrator]: A person's arrogance will bring him harm; and his humbleness will bring him benefit.

[Liao–Fan]: I often went to take the exams accompanied by others, and every time I would meet scholars who were very poor. I noticed that before they succeeded in passing the exams and became prosperous, their faces showed such humility, peace, and harmony that I felt I could almost hold that quality in my hands.

[Liao–Fan]: Several years ago, I took my imperial exam in Beijing. Among the ten applicants from my village, Ching–Yu Ding was the youngest and extremely humble. I told one of the applicants, Jin–Po Fay; that this young man would definitely pass the exam this year. Jin–Po Fay asked,

[Jin–Po]: How can you tell?

[Liao–Fan]: I said, 'Only those who are humble are qualified to receive fortune. My friend, look at the ten of us; is there anyone as honest, generous, and never tries to come in first, as Ching–Yu? Do you see anyone who is always respectful, tolerant, careful and humble like Ching–Yu? Do you see anyone like Ching–Yu, who, when he is insulted, does not talk back, or who, when he is slandered, does not argue? Any person who can achieve such a level of humility will receive protection from the heaven, earth, and spirits. There is no reason he will not become prosperous.' Sure enough, when the test results came out, Ching–Yu Ding passed.

[Liao–Fan]: One year in Beijing, I was staying with my childhood friend, Kai–Zhi Fung. I noticed that he always carried himself in a humble way, and had a kind and accommodating appearance. He was not a bit arrogant, which was an immense change from his childhood ways. Kai–Zhi had a friend named Ji–Yen Li who was straightforward and honest. Ji–Yen often scolded him on his mistakes, but Kai–Zhi always accepted the accusations calmly without talking back. I told him, 'Just as there are signs which warn of coming misfortune, we can see that prosperity comes to those who have cultivated the cause for it. Heaven will help those whose hearts are humble. You, my friend, will definitely pass the imperial examination this year!'. Later on, he indeed passed the exam.

[Liao–Fan]: There was a young man from San–tong Province named Yu–Fong Zhou who passed the first level of imperial examinations before he was even twenty. Unfortunately, try as he might, he could not pass the

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succeeding exams. When his father was moved to another post in the government, Yu-Fong went with him, and came to greatly admire a well-known scholar in that village named Min-Wu Chian. Yu-Fong brought his own essays to see this man. He had no idea that Mr. Chian would pick up his calligraphy brush and blot out his entire essay. Not only was Yu-Fong not angry, he sincerely accepted all of Mr. Chian's corrections and immediately changed his paper accordingly. A young man who could be that humble and showed such willingness to improve himself was very rare indeed. The following year, Yu-Fong passed the imperial examination.

[Liao-Fan]: One year, I went to the Capital to pay my respects to the Emperor. I met a scholar named Jian-Suo Hsia who had all the qualities of a great man without a trace of arrogance. I felt the intense aura of his virtue and humility all about him. When I returned home, I told my friend, "When heaven wants a person to prosper, it will first bestow him with wisdom. Wisdom can make a person honest and well-disciplined. Heaven has already bestowed Jian-Suo with wisdom, or he couldn't be that gentle, kind and good. Surely, heaven will now make him prosperous." Sure enough, when the test results came out, Jian-Suo passed the exam.

[Liao-Fan]: There was a scholar named Wei-Yan Chang from Jiang-ying who was very learned and wrote good essays. He was also very well-known among many scholars. One year he took his exam at Nanking and stayed at a Taoist temple. When the test results were posted, he found that he had not passed the exam. He became furious and loudly accused the examiner of being blind for not recognizing his obvious talents. At that time, a Taoist monk stood by smiling, and Wei-Yan immediately directed his anger towards the monk. The monk said to him,

[Monk]: Your essay must not be good!

[Liao-Fan]: Wei-Yan got even angrier and said,

[Wei-Yan]: How do you know it's not good when you haven't even read it?

[Liao-Fan]: The monk said,

[Monk]: I often hear people say that the most important element in writing good essays is a peaceful heart and harmonious temperament. Your loud and angry accusations just of now clearly shows that your mind is certainly not at peace and your temperament is violent. How could you possibly write good essays?

[Liao-Fan]: Wei-Yan obviously submitted to the Taoist's words and in turn asked him for his advice. The Taoist said,

[Monk]: Whether you pass or not depends on your fate. If you are destined not to pass, then no matter how good your paper is, you will still fail the exam. You yourself will have to make a few changes!

[Liao-Fan]: Wei-Yan asked,

[Wei-Yan]: How can I change it if it is predestined?

[Liao-Fan]: The monk replied,

[Monk]: Though the power to form your destiny lies in the Heavens, the right to recreate it is in yourself. As long as you are willing to do kind deeds and cultivate hidden virtues, there is nothing you ask that you will not receive.

[Liao-Fan]: Wei-Yan said,

[Wei-Yan]: I am only a poor scholar. What good deeds can I possibly do?

[Liao-Fan]: The monk said,

[Monk]: Practicing kind deeds and accumulating hidden virtues all stem from the heart. As long as you constantly harbor the intent to practice kindness and accumulate virtues, your merits are infinite and boundless! Take the virtue of humility for example, it does not cost anything; why can't you be humble and reflect on your own essay instead of blaming the examiner for being unfair?

[Liao-Fan]: Wei-Yan Chang listened to the Taoist monk, and from then on, suppressed his arrogant ways. He became very mindful of his own actions and tried not to make mistakes. Everyday he put forth additional effort to do more good deeds and accumulate more merits. Three years later, he dreamed one night that he entered a very tall house, and saw a booklet that contained all the names of the applicants who passed the exam that year. He saw many blank lines. Unable to understand what it meant, he asked the person next to him,

[Wei-Yan]: What is this?

[Liao-Fan]: The person replied,

[Person]: This is the booklet that contains all the names of the applicants who passed the exam this year.

[Liao-Fan]: Wei-Yan asked,

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[Wei-Yan]: Why does it have so many blank lines?

[Liao-Fan]: The person answered,

[Person]: The spirits of the underworld check on the applicants every three years. Only the names of those who practice kind deeds and do not make mistakes are allowed to appear in this booklet. The blank lines used to bear the names of those who were supposed to pass the exam, but due to their recent offenses, their names have been erased.

[Liao-Fan]: Then, pointing to a line, the person said:

[Person]: Ah-ha, for the past three years you have been very careful and have exerted such self-control that you haven't made any mistakes. Perhaps you should fill this blank. I hope you will cherish this opportunity and take care not to make any mistakes!

[Liao-Fan]: Sure enough, Wei-Yan passed the exam that year and placed 105th.

[Liao-Fan]: From the examples given above, we know that spirits and gods are always watching our behaviors from above. Therefore, we must immediately do whatever is beneficial to others and avoid doing whatever is violent, dangerous, and harmful to others. These are all things I can decide for myself. As long as I harbor good intentions; refrain from evil-doings; don't offend the heaven, earth, spirits, and gods; humble myself; be tolerant and not arrogant; then the heaven, earth, spirits and gods will constantly have pity on me; only then will I have a foundation for my future prosperity. Those who are full of conceit are definitely not destined to be great men. Even if they do prosper, they will not be able to enjoy their fortune for long. Intelligent people would definitely not make themselves small and narrow-minded and refuse the fortune they are entitled to. Besides, those who are humble always increase their opportunities to learn. If a person is not humble, who would want to teach him? Also, humble people are always willing to learn the strengths of others. When others perform good deeds, the humble person will learn and follow their examples. In this way, the kind deeds humble people accomplish are boundless! For those who wish to cultivate and improve upon their virtues, they especially, cannot do without the virtue of humility.

[Liao-Fan]: The ancients had an old saying,

[Narrator]: Those who have their hearts set on attaining success and fame, will surely attain success and fame. Those who have their hearts set on attaining wealth and position, will surely attain wealth and position.

[Liao-Fan]: A person who has great and far reaching goals is like a tree having roots. A tree with roots will eventually sprout into branches, flowers and, leaves. A person who has set down great and far reaching goals must humble himself in every thought and try to relieve another's burden even if the occurrence is as insignificant as a speck of dust. If you can reach this level of humility, you will naturally touch the hearts of heaven and earth. Furthermore, I am the creator of my own prosperity; if I truly want to create it, I will certainly succeed. Look at the applicants who sought for fame and wealth, in the beginning, they did not harbor a sincere heart; it was only a passing notion. When they fancied it, they sought it. When their interest dropped, they stopped. Mencius once told Emperor Shuan Chi,

[Mencius]: Your Highness has a love for music. But your love for music is only a personal pleasure. If you can expand from the heart which seeks after personal happiness to that of sharing happiness with all your subjects, and make them just as happy as you are, then, surely the nation is bound to prosper!

[Liao-Fan]: I think it is the same for those who are seeking to pass the imperial exams. If a person can expand upon the heart which seeks to pass the exams to that of diligently doing kind deeds and accumulating merits, putting forth his best efforts to improve his character, then both destiny and prosperity are his to create.