



Fo Guang Shan  
International Translation Center

# The Experience and Practice of Extraordinary People

**Buddhism in Every Step**

(英文版)

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Printed in Taiwan

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# The Experience and Practice of Extraordinary People

In today's connected society, it's not unusual for ordinary people to encounter unusual situations and take extraordinary actions. While this may seem like it is a recent phenomenon, ancient texts show us that ordinary people have encountered extraordinary situations for eons. Today, we will look back at a few of these occurrences. Our goal is to gain an understanding of the trials and tribulations these people faced and the wisdom they learned from their experiences.

Who are the "extraordinary people"? They are people that learned the virtues of extraordinary patience, commitment, wisdom, loving-kindness and compassion. By learning these virtues, they gained a special understanding of the meaning of life, and they were liberated from earthly worries as well as

the cycle of birth and death. They liberated themselves during difficult times in their lives.

In the following sections, we will look at these extraordinary people in Buddhism from six perspectives to see what we can learn from the wisdom they gained through their experiences and practices.

## **I. Extraordinary People in Buddhism from the Perspective of Patience**

When it comes to patience, some people may think they are patient because they have a good temperament, are kind to others, and are able to tolerate setbacks. But patience is not only the ability to tolerate nuisances in everyday life, patience is also the ability to tolerate insults and control ourselves when difficulties come to test us. The following short stories illustrate lessons we can learn from some of the extraordinary people who had great patience.

1. In the Song dynasty, Chan Master Fayuan of Fushan Monastery heard that there was an enlightened monk in the north; therefore, he invited Chan Master Yihuai of Tianyi Monastery as well as six other masters to join him and visit this famous monk. They traveled on foot and from the south. The trip was strenuous because they had to pass through many mountains and rivers. It took them several months

to reach the monastery. All of the eight masters followed the rules of accommodation and waited in the guest room. They waited from morning to noon, but none of the monks came to greet them. All of them were hungry and tired. Chilly winds constantly blew into the room, so four of the masters decided to leave the monastery because of hunger and cold. By sunset, there was still no one from the monastery coming to greet them, so three of the masters did not want to wait anymore and left. By evening, Master Fayuan was the only person waiting. The chilly wind continued to blow into the room. Master Fayuan was hungry and cold; his hands were numb. This did not break his determination to seek the Dharma. As he was holding his ground, the monk in charge of receiving guests came in and dismissed him. “Hey, why are you still sitting here? Leave now!”

Chan Master Fayuan was sitting still and sincerely expressing the desire to study the Dharma. Surprisingly, the monk did not listen to him and kept trying to dismiss him in every possible way.

“You should have already left, knowing that nobody has been paying attention to you. Why are you still here and trying to explain the purpose for your visit?”

Chan Master Fayuan was not at all deterred by the harsh words of the monk in charge of receiving guests and his intimidating actions, and remained

sitting calmly. Noticing that he was unwilling to move, the monk went inside to get a bucket of water, then returned and splashed the water over his head. Chan Master Fayuan was soaking wet, and the chilly wind froze the water on him. The chill went into his bones, but Master Fayuan remained sitting straight and motionless. He slowly spoke: “Great Virtuous One, I travelled thousands of miles to come here for the Dharma. How can a bucket of water get rid of me?”

Chan Master Fayuan, whose enthusiasm for pursuing the Dharma was not deterred by all sorts of difficulty, scolding, and insult, was finally accepted to stay at the temple as he had hoped. However, Master Fayuan’s life was more difficult after being allowed to stay in this monastery. All manner of suffering was amassed there.

Chan Master Fayuan was asked to cook for hundreds of people. He could not bear to see everyone endure such a hard life; therefore, one day he added some oil to the cooking pot and made salted porridge for everyone. Everyone enjoyed the porridge and even called it “five-flavor porridge.” As soon as the master in charge knew about this, he summoned Master Fayuan to scold him. He asked Fayuan, “How could you make porridge with the temple’s oil? You know how to do everyone a favor, don’t you? You must pay! Pay the temple back for its oil!”



Master Fayuan responded, with his palms pressed together, “But I don’t have money to pay.”

“Don’t have money to pay? Pay with your robe, quilt, and bedroll!”

Master Fayuan not only paid with all of his belongings but was also evicted. Now he had nothing. Nevertheless, Master Fayuan’s initial aspiration was not defeated. He meditated at the entrance of the temple with a calm mind, enduring heavy rain and gusty winds, all while waiting for an opportunity to enter the temple again for the Dharma. Half a month later, the Abbot noticed one person sitting at the entrance alone. The Abbot approached the person and realized it was Master Fayuan, who had been evicted because of adding oil to the porridge. He then walked over and scolded him: “Why are you still sitting here? How long have you been sitting?”

Master answered respectfully, “Half a month.”

The Abbot immediately falsely accused him: “What? You lived here half a month for free? I need to collect rent from you. Pay me the rent!”

At that moment Master Fayuan did not have anything, so how could he pay rent? He could only chant sutras to pay for his debt. Although enduring all kinds of suffering, he never gave up his vow to practice the Dharma. The Abbot saw that Master Fayuan was able to endure all this agony and was endowed with Dharma nature (intrinsic nature);

he then invited Master Fayuan to take over as the Abbot. Master Fayuan understood that the mind is our opponent and that we create a delusional realm in our own minds. By understanding his own mind, he could endure agony repeatedly, eliminate anger and defilement, and was finally enlightened through the Dharma, achieving the state that is described in the *Dhammapada*: “Abandon anger. Eliminate arrogance. Transcend all the restraints, and do not attach to the mind and materials. Agony and worry do not travel with a person who has attached to nothing.”

2. Jetsun Milarepa of Tibet practiced the Dharma based on patience and diligence. Young Milarepa practiced incantation and evil rituals in Vajrayana; he did not use his talent to help others. After realizing his wrongdoing, he repented and travelled thousands of miles to learn the Dharma from Guru Marpa Lotsawa. The guru knew Milarepa was not yet free from his old, bad habits; to help him eliminate his past bad karma, the guru enlightened him using different skillful methods, depending on the situation, so that he could forge his mind for patience. When Milarepa was holding a scripture on his way to the Buddha Hall to recite the sutra, the guru came up to him and forced him to leave, saying, “Take your scripture and go outside. My Dharma-protector god would sneeze after sniffing the evil energy from your sutra.”

Milarepa immediately felt ashamed. He thought, “Perhaps the guru knew that my scripture had incantations and spells in it. I can never commit misdeeds again using incantations.”

To support the guru, Milarepa begged for alms everywhere. He eventually begged for twenty-one liters of wheat, fourteen of which were sold for a brand-new copper lamp. The rest of the wheat was placed in a leather bag he made himself. He tied the bag and the lamp together, put them over his back, and trudged back to the temple. The bag full of wheat was very heavy, and the copper lamp almost crushed his shoulder. With great difficulty, he arrived at the guru’s abode; he was so tired by the time he reached the door that the bag and the lamp plummeted to the floor. The drop was heavy enough to shake the whole abode. The guru felt the jolt and came out to scold him: “You little brat! Quite a lot of strength you have. You want to make my house collapse and crush me to death, don’t you? How hateful! Take the bag away!”

The guru not only blamed him, but he also raised his foot and kicked him. Milarepa could do nothing but take the bag of wheat outside. He told himself, “The guru is grumpy. I must serve him better and with caution from now on.”

This type of condemnation with ulterior motives happened almost every day. The guru relentlessly and severely exhausted Milarepa’s body, hoping

to inspire Milarepa's intrinsic nature through harsh treatment. After Milarepa experienced all sorts of setbacks, insults, and goading, he finally obtained the right Dharma transmitted through the mind. After that, Guru Marpa Lotsawa treated Milarepa pleasantly; the teacher and the disciple buried their heads in their arms and cried bitterly. By enduring constant rebukes, setbacks, and humiliation, Milarepa finally attained the unsurpassed, wondrous truth. Therefore, the most stringent demands, as if they were carved in bone and engraved in the heart, are the compassion of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Only those who suffer the harshest of the harsh can attain bodhi and Buddhahood.

Patience in Buddhism is not only about tolerating reasonable condemnations, demands, and moments of temporary torment, but also about tolerating absurd and unreasonable misunderstandings. By regarding patience as the compassionate teaching of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, as well as the cultivation of merits and virtues, we can affirm our morality and integrity, and assure that truth and justice will be served in the end. In the past, as I was practicing Buddhism, I was given all sorts of tests and ordeals. Although the level of difficulties I experienced was one hundredth or one thousandth of what the ancient monks had experienced, the ordeals made me realize that the harshest tests are for eternal happiness. I also learned to stand still on the ground to brave myriad tribulations and

beatings by the winds, whether they blow from the East, South, West, or North. Everything I learned and I am capable of is from the hardships and toils I have endured.

3. Chan Master Miaoshan of Jinshan Temple, commonly known as the “Living Buddha of Jinshan,” passed away in Burma in 1933. He was mysterious but compassionate and giving. Even now, magical stories about his enduring what was impossible to endure and doing what was impossible to do are still circulated.

In an alley next to Jinshan Temple lived a poor old woman. She lived with her only son, but the son was rebellious and reckless. Every now and then he would hurt and yell at his own mother. Chan Master Miaoshan’s compassion arose after he heard of this. He then frequently visited the old woman and taught her the theory of karma. The unfilial son loathed the master for his frequent visits. One day a bad thought arose. He hid outside the door holding a bucket full of excrement. As soon as Chan Master Miaoshan came out through the door, he dumped the bucket of excrement over the Master’s head. From head to toe, the Master was covered with excrement, which caused such a sensation that everyone on the street came out to see. Chan Master Miaoshan did not become agitated or frightened but held the bucket up

on his head until he ran to the riverbank in front of Jinshan Temple. Spectators seeing the master in that seemingly embarrassing situation laughed boisterously. The Chan Master did not care at all about what was happening to him and said, “What’s funny about this? Human bodies are filth accumulated in a big bucket. Is it worth fussing when a small bucket of excrement is added to a big bucket of filth?”

Someone asked him, “Master, are you feeling bad?”

Chan Master Miaoshan answered, “I am not feeling bad at all. The old woman’s son was kind to me. He was anointing my head with warm ghee to enlighten me. He helped me impart wisdom to my mind, and my mind is now at ease.” Going through this level of humiliation, Chan Master Miaoshan was still able to single-mindedly turn away illusion and anger. How remarkable the master’s mind was! Afterward, the unfilial son was awakened. He apologized to the Chan Master and repented. The Living Buddha of Jinshan delightedly taught him, “The love and care our parents give to us is as high as a mountain, and as deep as an ocean. The Buddha says, ‘If one day we have to carry our father on the right shoulder, carry our mother on the left shoulder, clean up their waste, serve them with the best of food and clothing for a hundred years, we still cannot repay their kindness and care.’ How much effort did your

parents expend raising you, yet you not only could not make your mother happy but you also offended her. How could you be a human being when you do not have filial piety?”

The unfilial son felt remorse with his whole heart. He kneeled down in front of the Living Buddha, weeping repentantly, “I really should die! I really should die!”

Due to the good influence of the Living Buddha, the unfilial son repented his past mistakes. He was a changed person and even became famous for his filial piety. Afterward, he and his mother took refuge in the Buddha, received the precepts, and became Buddhists together.

Buddhists believe that “Using fighting to stop fights will not end fights. Only by being patient can we end fights.” The type of patience that the Living Buddha had is the spirit of willingness to sacrifice, rather than of timid behavior. It is said, “In practicing Buddhism one should get rid of anger, and patience is the strongest practice.” The power of patience is so strong, and its virtues are so great and many, that even giving and upholding the precepts cannot surpass it. An old poem says:

The string of a rigid bow always breaks first;  
The sharp edge of every steel blade always  
chips easily.

A wagging tongue only courts disaster;  
A vicious heart often causes transgression.

Things that are too rigid will break. If one uses violence and force to conduct one's life, one will easily be hurt and destroyed. Take our teeth and tongue as an example. Teeth are hard and fall off before we get old, while the tongue is soft and accompanies us until we die. Therefore, being stubborn and firm does not mean everlasting, and being soft and obedient does not mean weakness. Like in Hanshan's poem:

What to do when one defames me?  
Enduring and giving in a little do no harm.  
To be a role model for future generations,  
Be gentle but not inflexible.

Patience is a skill that can imperceptibly influence a person. If one can endure humiliation for a moment, a moment of perversity can be eliminated. If a person can practice patience for a lifetime, he or she can exert a subtle influence on another's stubbornness and stupidity for a lifetime.

The reason forged steel can become a material that can wrap around a finger depends on patience. We should be inspired by the stories of practicing patience of Chan Master Fushan Fayuan, Jetsun Milarepa, and Jinshan the Living Buddha.



## II. Extraordinary People in Buddhism from the Perspective of Vows

“Vows” are the great, fearless power to realize sublime goals and ideals and the willingness to sacrifice anything. As a Buddhist, the greatest vow is to continue the wisdom life of all Buddhas and to carry out the mission of the Buddha so that all sentient (feeling) beings are able to be liberated from the sea of suffering. In Buddhism, the power of vow that extraordinary people have comes from the loving-kindness and compassion to liberate sentient beings. This vow is made for all beings and for public justice, not for personal gain. It is the power of fearless spirit, and a thousand foes cannot bend their will; it is not an impulse that comes from emotions.

The power formed by combining vows and fearlessness is the faith that the whole world will step aside to let you by. There will be no unattainable goals or unachievable undertakings. Here are two successful stories in which vows and power are combined to attain goals.

1. Master Jianzhen of the Tang dynasty was from Yangzhou in Jiangsu Province. He was highly respected by local residents because he not only was fully educated in Buddhist Scripture and commentaries but also spared no effort to propagate the Dharma.

Two Japanese monastics, Rongrui and Puzhao, who had long respected the fame of Master Jianzhen, made a special trip across the ocean to invite the master to Japan to propagate the Dharma. In order to benefit all sentient beings through the Dharma, the master happily agreed. Many of his disciples advised him not to go so rashly, to avoid unexpected incidents, but Master Jianzhen said, “For accomplishing a great matter, why should I cherish my life!” He insisted on going to Japan to propagate the Dharma.

However, the master ran into obstacles one after another. Setting sail several times to Japan was so difficult that not only did the master not land in Japan to achieve the vow of transmitting the Dharma to Japan, but he was trapped on an isolated island in the ocean for two years. While on that island, the master lost his eyesight. Despite the extraordinary difficulties he encountered, the vow that the master made to sail across the ocean was not deterred. Deep in his mind he believed that nobody but him was the person to propagate the Dharma overseas; therefore, the more setbacks he encountered, the more persistent he became. After the sixth sailing and twelve years of hardship, the mission was accomplished completely.

Master Jianzhen brought religion, literature, medicine, architecture, clothing, art, crafts, vegetables, fruits, and historical artifacts to Japan. He spread these seeds in the soil of Japan, so that the

primitive Japanese people could be exposed to the mighty culture of the Tang dynasty and immersed in the bliss of the Dharma. To fulfill his vow of propagating the Dharma in a foreign country, Master Jianzhen made every effort to handle difficult residents, endure misunderstanding, advance despite adversity, and even contribute his own body. He used a fearless spirit to navigate through the whole journey, applied the loving-kindness and compassionate vows of the Buddha as a support, and finally accomplished the work necessary to inspire the propagation of the Dharma into the Japanese culture.

Therefore, vows are not constrained by time and space. They sprout through practicing patience and upholding precepts, and blossom through loving-kindness, compassion, and diligence.

2. Master Xuanzang of the Tang dynasty dedicated his whole life to the propagation and translation of sutras. He personally traveled the Gobi Desert and conquered the mountains to the West for sutras. His vow to spread the seeds of the Dharma and disseminate Buddhism never diminished, despite the long distance and time of the journey. Even when he was lost and on the verge of dying in the desert, he still clenched his teeth and vowed, “I would rather die while making one last step toward the West than live by retreating one step toward the East.” This

great vow even to sacrifice one's body for Buddhism enabled him to return home safely from India, where he had sought the sutras. He continued the legacy of Buddha's wisdom life and glory, and made Buddhism in China prosper from then on.

The four spirits in Buddhism are "compassion, wisdom, vow, and practice." Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva sympathizes and is concerned for all beings suffering in hell; he vowed not to attain Buddhahood until hell is empty, and also vowed to attain Buddhahood only after all sentient beings are liberated. This kind of great vow consists of the spirits of great compassion, great wisdom, and great practice. So, when we look at extraordinary people in Buddhism from the perspective of vows, we should look not only at the size of the vow, but also realize the great sublime vows of the ancient sages. This is the reason they are extraordinary.

### **III. Extraordinary People in Buddhism from the Perspective of Wisdom**

In Buddhism, not only are there eighty-year-old Chan masters who are extraordinary people and experience unusual events, but sometimes there are ten-year-old novice monks who can also be called extraordinary. An excellent example is the seven-year-old novice monk Juntou, who attained arhatship (one who has

attained awakening and achieved liberation). Here are some other examples of the wisdom of extraordinary people.

1. A long time ago there were two countries fighting with each other. Country A issued an ultimatum against Country B. In the ultimatum, Country A asked Country B to answer eight questions within several days. If the answers were satisfactory, Country A would yield to Country B. If Country B could not answer these questions, it would imply Country B did not have scholars with wisdom and was not capable of founding a country.

Officials and scholars in Country B were puzzled by the eight questions. No one had answers. Seeing a disaster was coming, the king was as anxious as an ant in a hot pot. He had to post an announcement and let all the subjects in the country know that whoever could answer these eight questions would be awarded a high-ranking position with an excellent endowment. Day after day, as the deadline approached, no one showed up in front of the king. On the last day, one senior Chan master who had traveled a long distance to the country read the eight questions in the announcement and started clapping and laughing. He tore off the announcement and went to the king. He told the king, "These questions are too simple. I can answer them." The eight questions and answers were:

a. What water is more than all the water in the ocean? The senior Chan master said, “A cup of Dharma water is more than all the water in the ocean.” Pouring a cup of water on a withered flower so that the flower can survive and continue to grow: this cup of water provides timely irrigation, and is sweet dew. Giving a cup of water to a thirsty person so that he no longer thirsts: this cup of water is fresh spring water. Spraying blissful Dharma water onto a desperate, miserable person’s heart so that his dried-up mind is refreshed and brings him back to life develops his wisdom and makes contributions to society; one spoon of Dharma water is much greater than all the water in the ocean.

b. Which people are the most beautiful? People with a kind and compassionate heart are. Beauty from clothing and appearance is short-lasting. People eventually get old. Clothing eventually wears out. Only a kind and compassionate heart is everlasting. A kind and compassionate person can transform a bad state into a good one, hypocrisy into sincerity, and the rotten into the ethereal. A kind and compassionate person makes everyone around him feel the hospitality and warmth of society.

c. Which people are the wealthiest? People who practice giving are. It is because people who practice giving have joyful, tranquil, content and always happy mind. What is given is finite, tangible wealth, but those people's giving will obtain infinite, intangible treasures in their hearts. Thus people who give to charity are the wealthiest.

d. Which people are the poorest? Greedy and miserly people are. It is because miserly people will never be satisfied. The more they desire, the more misery they have. Their mind is like a barren land that can never grow the fruit of happiness. Thus, a lack of tangible materials is not poverty, but poverty in the mind is great poverty.

e. With a pair of horses, how does one distinguish which is the mother and which is the daughter when both of them have the same height, weight, and color? The Chan master said, "Lay a stack of hay on the ground and see which horse lets the other go first. The yielding horse is the mother, and the first to eat is the daughter. This is because parental love is universal; parental love exists even among animals. A mare is sure to love its foal, and will let it eat first."

f. With a pair of snakes, how does one distinguish which is female and which is male when they are both of the same color and size? The Chan master quick-wittedly answered the question: “Net the two snakes. The male will anxiously look for an exit and help the female escape. The female will stay calm in the net. We can make the distinction from that.”

g. What is the most powerful strength? The old master said, “Being patient is the most powerful.” Master Hanshan had a poem:

Anger is fire in the mind;  
It can burn down the forest of our virtue.  
To practice the bodhisattva path,  
Protect our true mind with patience.

The power of patience is the ability to transform greed and anger into joyfulness, and to transform distress into peacefulness. The power of patience is so strong that no one can guard against it.

h. Which people have the least freedom? Some may believe those who are incarcerated have the least freedom. In fact, those who commit crimes without being caught have the least



freedom. Although they have not been caught and put in jail, the perpetrators feel worried every single second, whatever they are doing, and are condemned by their conscience day and night. The perpetrators are literally locked up in the complete darkness of their “mind prison.” People like the perpetrators who are troubled by their conscience have the least freedom.

The senior Chan master’s wisdom saved the country and its subjects from the havoc of war. It again proved that wisdom can transform weapons into jade and violence into peace.

2. In Buddhism, there was also a smart Bhiksu Nagasena; from the deeds that reveal his wisdom, he was also a remarkable person. One time King Milinda (Menander I the Savior) intentionally questioned Bhiksu Nagasena. The king said, “You are not from the era when Buddha was born, and have never seen Sakyamuni Buddha; how do you know if the Buddha existed or not?”

The smart Bhiksu asked him, “King, who passed the throne to you?”

“My father passed it on to me.”

“Who passed the throne to your father?”

“Grandfather.”

“Who passed the throne to your grandfather?”

“Great grandfather.”

Bhiksu Nagasena continued asking, “Do you believe there was a founding monarch in your country if we keep tracing back generation by generation?”

King Milinda answered calmly, “Of course I believe there was.”

“Have you seen the founding monarch?”

“No, I haven’t seen him.”

The Bhiksu asked the King again, “If not, how can we believe there was one?”

“Our founding monarch established codes, rules, statutes, and laws; this is recorded history. Although I have never seen him, I believe he existed.”

Bhiksu Nagasena nodded with a smile and said, “We believe the Buddha did exist because in Buddhism there are the Buddha, the teachings, and the monastic community; there are the scriptures, disciplines, and the commentaries; there are the disciplines made by the Buddha and historical records about the Buddha and Buddhism. He is definitely not an imaginary character. This truth is the same as the truth of the founding monarch in your country.”

King Milinda was no longer able to question Bhiksu Nagasena on this topic, so he asked another difficult question. He asked the Bhiksu, “Buddhists like you often say that the happiest thing in life is the attainment of nirvana, reaching the state of no rebirth, no death and no extinguishment. So bhiksu, have you attained nirvana?”

Bhiksu Nagasena answered humbly, with his palms pressed together, “I am ashamed, but not yet.”

King Milinda asked triumphantly, “If you have not attained nirvana, how do you know the state of nirvana?”

Bhiksu Nagasena did not answer the question directly; instead, he asked King Milinda, “King, if I use a big knife and cut your upper arm off, would you be in pain?”

King Milinda was infuriated and said, “Of course it would be painful. How would it not be painful when my upper arm is cut off?”

Bhiksu Nagasena continued to ask, “If your upper arm has never been cut off by anyone, how do you know it would hurt?”

King Milinda answered, “I have seen others suffering from pain when their upper arms were cut off, so I know for sure it would hurt.”

Bhiksu Nagasena answered with a smile, “King, I have also seen the happiness from others when they attained nirvana, so I know the wondrous state of nirvana.”

King Milinda’s difficult question was again repudiated, but the King refused to give in. He tried with all of his effort to come up with a third question and asked the bhiksu, “You Monastics have loving-kindness and compassion. How do you forgive your rivals?”

Bhiksu Nagasena smiled heartily and said, “King, if your leg had an ulcer, would you cut your leg off?”

“No!”

“King, what would you do then?”

“I would carefully clean it and apply ointment. The ulcer would heal as time passed.”

Bhiksu Nagasena said, “Yes, rivals and bad people are like an ulcer. If an ulcer is not taken care of or treated, it will grow and worsen. Therefore, rivals and bad people need to be washed by the Dharma water, transforming them from evil to good. This is the same idea with which you take care of the ulcer on your leg.”

King Milinda was nodding his head in approval, but he came up with another question after some quick thinking: “You always advise people to cultivate good merits for the next life. If you have not experienced death, how do you know there is a life after death?”

Bhiksu Nagasena kindly answered, “This can be compared to oranges. When oranges are ripe, they fall to the ground. Days later, the orange pulp rots, but the seeds are buried in the soil. When the timing is right, the seeds will sprout, and will grow into orange trees. Human bodies are only transient combinations of the four great elements. When this illusory state vanishes, the body dies, but the consciousness

can continue to transmigrate from life to life, like the seeds of oranges. Not only is there one future rebirth, but there are also unlimited future rebirths.”

King Milinda was unwilling to give in, and raised the fifth question. Each question was getting harder and harder to answer, but Bhiksu Nagasena had extraordinary wisdom and knowledge; still smiling, he confidently explained to the king.

3. In Buddhism there are similar types of wisdom recorded everywhere in the scriptures and books. Famous Chan Master Ikkyu had an awakening mind that could overturn heaven and earth in the span of a common conversation. One day, a disciple was saying goodbye to Chan Master Ikkyu. The disciple said, “Master, I don’t want to live anymore and I want to kill myself.”

Chan Master asked, “Nothing is going wrong with your life, so why do you want to end your life?”

“Master, my business failed. Now I am in debt and under the pressure of the debt collectors. I cannot handle it anymore; only death can resolve this.”

“Is death the only solution? Is there any other choice?”

“No. I only have one young daughter, and I am at the end of my rope, without any other choice.”

The Chan Master hit upon an idea and said, “I have a solution!”

The disciple hurriedly asked, “Master, what solution do you have?”

“As long as you allow your daughter to marry me and I become your son-in-law, the problem will be solved.”

His disciple was astonished, “This ... this is ridiculous! You are my master; how could you be my son-in-law?”

Chan Master Ikkyu waved his hands with confidence and answered, “I want to help you solve the problem. Please go back and make the announcement as soon as possible. On the day of the wedding, I will arrive at your house and be your son-in-law.”

This disciple always believed in Chan Master Ikkyu’s wisdom, so, after getting back to his hometown, he immediately announced that Master Ikkyu would soon be his son-in-law and would marry his daughter on such and such date. After the announcement was made, the whole town was surprised. On the day of the wedding, bystanders flooded into the businessman’s house to witness this strange event. When Master Ikkyu arrived leisurely on foot, he did not say a word but asked someone to set up a table in front of the entryway and place on it the four treasures of the study—brush, ink, paper, and ink stone. This intrigued the bystanders even more; everyone was holding their breath, ready to see what was going to happen. Master Ikkyu calmly sat down at the

table and started to write calligraphy. In a short time the table was filled with Master Ikkyu's calligraphic papers. Everyone enjoyed Master Ikkyu's calligraphy and forgot the reason for being there. As a result, all of Master Ikkyu's calligraphic papers sold in fifteen minutes. The money from selling the papers piled up as tall as a hill.

The Chan Master asked this disciple, "Is the money enough to pay off your debt?"

The disciple kept bowing and said cheerfully, "Enough! Master, you are magical. All of a sudden you conjured up this much money!"

Chan Master Ikkyu brushed his sleeves and said, "All right, the problem has been solved. I don't have to be your son-in-law but will continue to be your master. Good bye."

On another day, a military general sent a card inviting Chan Master Ikkyu to his house to make an offering. The Chan master always wore shabby clothes, so for this banquet he wore what he normally would. When he arrived, the guard at the gate saw him and yelled, "Where did this crazy monk come from? Get out! Get out!"

The Chan master quickly responded, "Your boss invited me here for a banquet; how could you kick me out?"

The guard rolled his eyes and said, "Nonsense! My boss would not invite a master like you to a

banquet. The person he invited today is the dignified, great Chan Master Ikkyu. Why don't you look at yourself in a mirror? Go quickly, Go quickly."

Chan Master Ikkyu was stopped at the gate, so he had to return to his temple and change to a dignified robe, then return to the General's house. This time, when the guard saw Chan Master Ikkyu wearing such a dignified robe, he respectfully welcomed the Chan master. The Chan master was sitting at the dining table with gourmet dishes. When the banquet started, the master picked the food from every dish and put it into the sleeves of his robe. The General was very surprised. He thought the Chan master was bringing the food back home to enjoy later and felt embarrassed that the master was doing this in front of the group; the General then spoke to the Chan master in a whisper: "Master, this is an embarrassing thing to do when there are so many people sitting at the dining table. After all the guests leave, I will have someone prepare extra food so you can bring it home with you."

The Chan master softly responded, "You did not invite me to eat, you invited my robe to eat. When I arrived, I was stopped at the gate. I was not allowed to come in until I wore this robe. Isn't this inviting my robe to a banquet?" After he finished talking, he left the robe on the dining table and walked home in his shabby clothes.



Nowadays, are there many people who only respect nice clothing but not people and only ask about power but not moral conduct? Chan Master Ikkyu's used his wisdom in transforming people skillfully according to situations, no matter whether with a person of his own high stature, or with the common people; Chan Master Ikkyu revealed unsurpassed wisdom and demonstrated his exceptional ability to envision the future.

A wealthy disciple invited Chan Master Ikkyu to his house to take a look at his collection of antiques. After his visit, the wealthy person asked the Chan master what he thought. Master Ikkyu said, "Your antiques are average. In my temple, I have one dish that is ten thousand years old, and one bowl that is five thousand years old. These are truly priceless and indeed second to none."

The wealthy person was very impressed when he heard this, and immediately asked, "Are there such treasures in your temple? Master, please set a price; I will buy all of them."

The Chan master contemplated and then said, "If you really want them, I can part with my antiques. I am offering them to you for three thousand silver dollars."

The wealthy person was extremely happy. He immediately asked his family members to bring in the three thousand silver dollars, and said, "Please

take these silver dollars first. I will go to the temple to pick up the antiques tomorrow.”

The next day, when the wealthy person came to the temple to pick up the antiques, Master Ikkyu instructed the servant, “Please take this gentleman to the backyard. All of the dishes and bowls belong to him now.”

The wealthy person was excited, but when he got to the backyard, he did not see any treasure but a bowl for cats to drink water and a dish for dog food. The wealthy person became angry and went to argue with the Chan master: “How could a dog dish and a cat bowl be worth three thousand silver dollars?”

Chan Master Ikkyu laughed and said, “How could they be worth only three thousand silver dollars? I wasn’t even willing to sell them for thirty thousand silver dollars; I was doing you a favor. It is your good fortune that you are able to obtain these two pieces of treasure.”

Upon hearing what the master said, the wealthy person thought this was unreasonable. He could only go home with resentment and regrets. Soon, the story of the wealthy person donating three thousand silver dollars spread throughout his town. The wealthy person was respected and praised by the residents in his town, and overnight he became a symbol of loving-kindness and compassion. Not until then did the wealthy person realize: Master Ikkyu was teaching

him the lesson that when one is wealthy one cannot be heartless. What he bought with three thousand silver dollars was not a cat bowl or dog dish, but compassion and righteousness. This merit is far greater than the value of the thousands of silver dollars.

Chan Master Ikkyu used his wisdom to save, teach, and liberate people. His wisdom turned hopeless situations into hope-filled ones, turned a disrespectful man into a respectful person, and changed a miser into a philanthropist. Chan Master Ikkyu was able to teach the teachings of the Buddha using everyday items such as a brush, ink, paper, clothes, even dirty cat bowls and dog dishes. How can we measure his great wisdom? Such great wisdom originates from the teachings of all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas; how can we ignore these teachings?

#### **IV. Extraordinary People in Buddhism from the Perspective of Loving-kindness and Compassion**

In Buddhism there have been many people with great loving-kindness and compassion. When they saw sentient beings suffering, they also suffered. To liberate sentient beings from dire straits, they would not hesitate to sacrifice their own life and body. The spirit of “practicing benevolence and kindness and helping people with a universal love” has created

many extraordinary people and stories in Chinese Buddhism.

1. The Living Buddha of Jinshan treated illness. If a patient had an abscess, he would suck on the abscess, despite the filth. Moreover, he would swallow the pus and blood that he sucked out so that the patient would not be disgusted when seeing the pus. This “ability to do difficult and rare” actions is the spirit of loving-kindness and compassion that touches everyone.

2. One night while Japanese Master Kuya was meditating, a vicious bandit broke into the master’s room. He was holding a shiny steel knife, threatening to take Master Kuya’s money. Master Kuya emptied his boxes and drawers, and gave all his belongings to the bandit, with his eyes full of tears. Upon seeing the monk bursting into tears, the bandit talked to him with contempt: “What a useless master. You monastics should have already forgone everything in the world. Such little money should not be worth crying over, as if you were losing your parents.”

“I felt sad and wept not for losing money, but for you.” The Chan master continued, “You have killed and committed robbery, so you have already planted the seeds of being reborn in the lower realm. I was crying for you going down to hell to endure immeasurable suffering.”

As sutras say, “Bodhisattvas fear causes; sentient beings fear effects.” Ordinary, ignorant sentient beings covet only momentary enjoyments, even if the enjoyment is gained from misconduct, and do not care about the suffering from the effect of their bad actions. It is similar to licking honey from a sword. Although the honey is tasted, the tongue is also cut. With boundless wisdom, bodhisattvas see and clearly understand that pleasure through the five desires and six sense objects is the root of extreme suffering in the future; therefore, with endless compassion, bodhisattvas use skillful means to teach sentient beings to abandon momentary, illusory pleasure, and to pursue the ultimate bliss of nirvana.

Sadaprarudita (known as the Ever Wailing Bodhisattva) often sobbed for sentient beings, because when he saw sentient beings in the unwholesome world—suffering from poverty, aging, sickness, worries, and agony—he identified with their suffering. Master Kuya’s tears reveal the concern that all bodhisattvas have for sentient beings. The sorrows that all bodhisattvas have for sentient beings are in Master Kuya’s tears.

3. Chan Master Sengqun of the Jin dynasty was indifferent to fame and wealth throughout his life. He lived in seclusion in Mount Hou. His house was simple and crude. His diet was vegetarian and light. He

felt comfortable in poverty and practiced the Way. Mount Hou is an isolated island in an ocean. There was a stone basin on the top of the island, about six to seven meters deep. A clear spring gurgled and flowed out of the basin. The spring water smelled great and tasted sweet; it was just like drinking sweet dew and nectar. Chan Master Sengqun drank the spring water every single day to allay his hunger, instead of eating grain. Separating his hay hut and the stone basin there was a clear stream. The Chan master thus built a wooden bridge over the stream so he could reach the basin each day and soothe his hunger.

One day as the Chan master was walking across the bridge with his water bag, he saw a duck with broken wings resting on the tiny bridge. The duck saw the master coming, and extended its neck to show resistance. The Chan master was considering staving off the duck with his walking staff, but he also worried that he might hurt the duck. Instead of hurting the duck, he returned home with his empty water bag and empty stomach. The next day the Chan master went to get water and the duck was still standing on the bridge, with his neck extended. The Chan master could not do anything but hold his hunger and return home. The next morning the master again went to get water. The duck still had not left the bridge. The duck remained on the bridge for several more days. Because the master was afraid of scaring the duck, he

had not had any water for many days and finally died of dehydration.

The spirit of sacrifice that the virtuous ancients had to “devote themselves only for the sake of liberating sentient beings from suffering, and not to pursuing peace and happiness for themselves” exemplifies the Buddha’s kind and compassionate mind.

4. Master Fajing of the Wei and Jin dynasties was highly respected by government officials and civilians because of his wisdom and compassion. Once, an area was suffering from famine. Corpses from starvation were all over; it was a miserable situation. Master Fajing therefore fasted, cleaned his body, and carried knives and salt to the stone caves in a mountain where starving people were gathered. He taught the starving victims and helped them take refuge in the Triple Gem (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha). After the Triple Gem Ceremony, he hung his robe on a tree and spoke kindly: “I am here to make an offering of my life to everyone today. Please take the flesh from my body to fulfill your hunger.”

When everyone saw the master whom they highly respected willingly sacrificing himself to save their lives, they were hesitant to do it. Master Fajing had to lift the knife, cut off his own flesh, sprinkle some salt on it, and serve it in dishes to everyone. No one was able to fight against the suffering of

their hunger; they had no other option but to swallow Master Fajing's clean flesh with their tears. In order to save more sentient beings, Master Fajing overcame his fear of physical pain and sacrificed his life with boundless joy.

When the Buddha was practicing in his causal practice, he also cut off his flesh to feed an eagle and sacrificed his body to feed a tiger. This is how he finally accomplished the bodhisattva path of carrying out what is arduous and enduring what is difficult to endure. In the bodhisattvas' eyes, all sentient beings and bodhisattvas are of one body. Having loving-kindness and compassion to benefit sentient beings is the path to accomplishing Buddhahood. Becoming Buddhas and bodhisattvas is the result of their great compassion for all sentient beings. This great compassion awakens the mind. Therefore, among sentient beings is where we practice the bodhisattva path; with loving-kindness and compassion, all the torments and difficulties that sentient beings may bring to us will become ghee and sweet dew to us.

## **V. Extraordinary People in Buddhism from the Perspective of Supernatural Abilities**

In Buddhism, many Chan masters are among the most extraordinary of extraordinary people. They apply their supernatural abilities to skillfully teach



based on the situation, in order to be free of their anger and ignorance. These stories are all very unusual.

1. There was a Chan Master Feixi, whose birth name was Deng Yinfung. Why was he called Feixi (meaning “Flying Staff”)? It is said that once he was in the middle of a battlefield where troops from two countries were fighting against each other and the people were unable to live in peace. He advised both troops to drop their weapons and stop fighting, but no one was listening to this monk because the troops were heartless with their weapons. Chan Master Deng Yinfung had no choice but to toss his walking staff into the air while he also flew into the sky. Soldiers in the fierce battle suddenly saw a monk flying in the air. They were so astonished, they forgot to fight. Hence Master Deng Yinfung was named the Feixi Master.

2. In *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, there is a story about Master Puhua. One day he was begging for alms: “I need one article of clothing to wear as alms.”

When his disciples heard this, they all made him an article of clothing. However, as the Master saw the clothes they had made, he frowned and pushed the clothes away with both hands. He said, “I don’t want this one. I don’t want that one either.”

“Didn’t you want clothes? Now that the clothes are being provided, why are you saying no to them?”

The disciples were scratching their heads, but Master Puhua kept saying, “I want clothes! I want clothes!”

When Chan Master Linji learned of this, he gave Master Puhua a coffin. Master Puhua said cheerfully, “I now have clothes! I now have clothes! Chan Master Linji knows my mind. Since I have clothes to wear, I can set off now.” He then made an announcement in town: “Everyone, I am going to die tomorrow. I will die in a sitting posture at the East Gate.”

Everyone was curious upon hearing this. They rushed to the East Gate in the early morning to check it out. As expected, Master Puhua arrived at the East Gate carrying a coffin on his shoulder. When he got there, he looked around and said to everyone, “Many of you are here to watch me die, which causes me a lot of inconvenience. I have decided not to die today. I will go to the South Gate and die there tomorrow.”

The next day at the South Gate, there was a huge crowd of people. He frowned again and said, “There are too many people at the South Gate. I have decided not to die today. I will go to the West Gate and die there tomorrow.”

The next day at the West Gate, there were still quite a lot of people. Monk Puhua complained again: “I will not die comfortably under the watchful eyes

of everyone. I will wait until tomorrow when I am at the North Gate and no one is watching me.”

The spectators were disappointed once again. They thought, “We were deceived by this insane master. How could someone die when he or she says so? He must have been joking. We will not go to the North Gate tomorrow.”

The next day, Master Puhua carried the coffin to the North Gate. He looked around and mumbled, “It is so peaceful! If I don’t die now, when can I do it?” He then jumped into the coffin and died.

The news spread, and everyone rushed to see this. Everyone was grumbling, “What a pity. We did not get to see him die.”

Driven by curiosity, everyone wanted to see what he looked like after death. They opened the coffin but found nothing inside. Instead, they heard waves of faint chanting of the Buddha’s name in the air...

Master Puhua had not been begging for real clothes, but for life and death. It is easy to put on and take off a piece of clothing. But the clothing of life and death is much more difficult, and so, a lot of times we refuse to put them on when it is time to put them on, and refuse to remove them when it is time to remove them. Master Puhua’s extraordinary alms-begging shows that he was at ease with life, death and liberation.

## **VI. Extraordinary People in Buddhism from the Perspective of Diligence**

Finally, let's discuss extraordinary people who practice diligence in Buddhism.

Chan Master Lanrong is one of the best examples. His diligence is beyond the capabilities of we people nowadays. When Chan Master Lanrong was reading a book, if he was hungry, he would randomly pick up a sweet potato. He read and ate at the same time, and seemed to enjoy the food. A disciple next to him saw this, and screamed with surprise, "Master! Why are you eating a rock?"

Lanrong took a look and realized it was indeed a rock. He then answered without a care, "A rock is also tasty. A rock is tasty too!"

He was even more focused when chanting a scripture. His chanting was continuous and intense, and he entered into a state where goddesses scattered flowers and the sound of flowing streams expounded the sutra. His disciples saw him chanting in a state of meditative concentration, without noticing his snot was dripping slowly. They reminded him, "Master, your snot is almost dripping into your mouth!"

He responded without raising his eyelids, "I do not have time to wipe my nose for ordinary people like you."

We know of the arrival of autumn by the falling of one leaf; from the effectiveness of diligence of Chan Master Lanrong, we have learned about the spiritual states of Buddhism. That is not only about the spirit of selflessness, or forging and accumulating vows, but also about the complete transformation of body and mind throughout the ages.

Extraordinary people are also human beings. The reason they are unusual is because of their spirit of extraordinary patience, vows, wisdom, compassion, and diligence. In our daily life, if we are always aware and always practice self-control and watch our speech, and protect our inherent mind no matter what we do, we can experience the right thought and right awakening of the Buddha's teachings. By learning and practicing these virtues, everyone can become a modern, extraordinary person in Buddhism.



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All of the Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center's publications are offered for free distribution, funded by the generous donations of our supporters.

The staff of FGSITC would like to thank in particular the sponsorship of the Fo Guang Shan branch temples around the world. It is their continued, long-term support which makes our publications possible.

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