



My Answers

我對問題的回答

Hear Me Out

貧僧有話要說系列

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Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center

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## A Brief Biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun

Venerable Master Hsing Yun was born in Jiangsu Province, China in 1927. He has studied at various renowned Buddhist institutions such as Qixia Vinaya College and Jiaoshan Buddhist College.

Master Hsing Yun arrived in Taiwan in 1949, and soon after became the chief editor of the publication, *Human Life*. In 1952, his efforts in establishing Buddhist Chanting Groups strengthened the foundation for his subsequent endeavors in the promotion of the Dharma. The Master founded Fo Guang Shan Monastery in 1967, with the primary goal of promoting Humanistic Buddhism through Buddhist education, culture, charity, and propagation of the Dharma. Since then, over two hundred branch temples have been established in major cities around the world. He

also set up art galleries, libraries, publishing houses, bookstores, mobile clinics, Buddhist colleges, and universities including University of the West, Fo Guang University, Nan Hua University, Nan Tien Institute, and Guang Ming College. Since 1970, Da Tzu Children's Home, Fo Guang Senior Home have been built to support and assist those in need of emergency relief and social services.

In 1977, the Fo Guang Tripitaka Editing Board was formed to compile the *Fo Guang Buddhist Canon* and *Fo Guang Dictionary of Buddhism*. Others including *Selected Chinese Buddhist Texts in Modern Language*, *Fo Guang Textbooks*, *Essential Guides to Buddhism*, *Pearls of Wisdom: Prayers for Engaged Living* have also been published.

Master Hsing Yun has dedicated his life to propagating Humanistic Buddhism. As a “global citizen,” he continues to foster “joy and harmony,” “oneness and coexistence,” “respect and tolerance,” and “equality and peace” throughout the world. When he founded the Buddha's Light International Association in 1991 and was elected president of its world headquarters, he was closer to realizing the

ideal of having “the Buddha’s light shining throughout the three thousand realms, and the Dharma water flowing across the five continents.”







## Foreword to *Hear Me Out*

In March 2015, the Taipei City Government questioned Tzu Chi Foundation's disputed Neihu District project which had been turned down by four consecutive Mayors of Taipei. This controversy caused widespread public criticism and stirred up issues which drew in the entire Buddhist religion.

The truth is, Tzu Chi certainly has contributed positively to society, and their charitable and generous acts in relief aid and service over the past decades cannot be so easily denied. While Tzu Chi has gathered Buddhists and society in making charitable donations for social welfare projects, it is nevertheless no more than a social welfare organization, not a Buddhist order that is rooted in temples or monasteries.

Certainly, Tzu Chi must reflect on this matter. Other than a series of controversies, there is also the issue of Tzu Chi having kept donors and the public in the dark regarding its financial status. Since I, a humble monk, am also somewhat connected with Tzu Chi since I attended the groundbreaking ceremony of a Tzu Chi site fifty years ago, I feel obliged to speak up on behalf of innocent Buddhists whose faith and reputation have been jeopardized by public criticism.

In the beginning, I only set out to write one or two messages regarding the matter, but as the critique of Tzu Chi and even Buddhism itself continued to worsen, I therefore extended into the third, fourth, and then all the way to the twentieth message. I remember even when I was in Hainan, China, to attend the 2015 Boao Forum for Asia, I was still busy writing a foreword for the “Humble Monk” series that was being published for the *Merit Times*’ 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

Unexpectedly, these messages received an overwhelming response, from Buddhists and non-Buddhists worldwide. Throughout the seventy-seven years of my life as a monk, I have never been

so well-received by Buddhists, who requested that I keep writing. Feeling very touched by such enthusiasm, I therefore continued to narrate these articles, which were transcribed by Venerable Miao Kuang and members of my secretariat. As a result, forty messages from a humble monk have been completed to date.

These forty messages serve as an explanation. Sixty years ago, I settled in Yilan and began propagating Humanistic Buddhism by involving youths in music, singing, and dancing activities. In 1963, I then established a Buddhist College in Kaohsiung to recruit youths to study, practice, and devote themselves to Buddhism, in particular, to the propagation of Humanistic Buddhism. The college was later relocated to Fo Guang Shan, which, after fifty years, has managed to expand to all five continents of the world.

The Fo Guang Shan Order is not under the name of any individual but belongs to all Buddhists and devotees. As I narrate these stories on how Fo Guang Shan has established cultural, educational, and charitable undertakings for society without concealing any

facts, it is my hope to provide a report to the public and devotees, which should be deemed a good intention. At the same time, I would also like to provide a guideline to my disciples in their future spiritual endeavors. For example, I wish for them to develop the spirit of equality, to take matters into their own hands by saying that “the future of Buddhism is on my shoulders,” to regard illness as a companion, to be willing to relieve people from suffering and adversity, to cherish life, to care for the environment, and to value spiritual preservation.

For any religion, if you believe in it, then it is Buddha or God to you; if you do not, it is nothing but Mara or the Devil to you. Be it Buddha or Mara, God or Devil, it is all up to you to decide. I hereby humbly express my hope for society to be purified, for moral values to be enhanced, for society as a whole to be bettered, and for there to be peaceful exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. I bear no further wishes in writing this book.

In the beginning, these articles were published in the *Merit Times* newspaper. As more and more requests to sponsor the publication of this as a book

continue to pour in, I hereby entrust the Venerable Master Hsing Yun Public Education Trust Fund, readers of the *Merit Times*, and all devotees to print and publicly distribute one million free copies of *Hear Me Out: Messages from a Humble Monk*. All you need to do is fill out a form, and without having to pay a cent, a complimentary copy of this book will be delivered to you by Fo Guang Shan.

Other than the forty messages, some appendices have also been collected in this book, along with selected responses from my readers. To establish a correct view and understanding in Buddhism among the world of humanity is my greatest hope of all.

In hearing the disciple who is responsible for producing this book explain that the cost for each copy is about NTD\$500, my reply was that money is not the issue: what matters is what we are offering to them—namely, our honesty and sincerity. I therefore would like to offer this book as a gift to all readers, that you may all be blessed with safety and peace:

May kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity pervade the Dharma realms;

May all people and heavenly beings  
benefit from our blessings and  
friendship;

May our ethical practice of Chan,  
Pure Land, and the Precepts help  
us to realize equality and patience;

May we undertake the Great Vows with  
humility and gratitude.

*Hsing yun*

May 16th, 2015

Fo Guang Shan Monastery,  
Founding Master's Quarters



## My Answers

*The fifty-three questions listed certainly are not enough to cover all the questions I have been asked over the past seventy years. In the future, if conditions allow, perhaps a book on a thousand questions can be published.*





Throughout my journey of Dharma propagation, the time at the end of my Dharma lectures has always been filled with questions from the audience. I recall that there have been at least thousands of questions, but I never had the chance to keep a written record of them all. Remembering them is almost impossible, too, but I have listed fifty-three of them here as a record of my interaction with these audiences. The number fifty-three also symbolizes Sudhana's fifty-three visits to virtuous teachers who inspired him.

The following questions are asked from the audience's perspective, while my answers are given in first person.

**Q1: Do we have to be vegetarian on a full-time basis, or only on the 1st and 15th day, or on the 3rd, 6th, and 9th day of the lunar month?**

*Answer:*

Buddhists advocate vegetarianism for the purpose of caring for lives and nurturing our compassion.



Many years ago in America, a boy shot a bird with an arrow but it continued to fly with the arrow wedged in its body. Realizing that it must be very painful, a nationwide search for the bird made national television and newspapers.

This news coverage caused some people to wonder, “At every Thanksgiving, Americans kill millions of turkeys without even raising an eyebrow. Is it necessary to stir up a nationwide fuss over one little bird?”

Human beings take lives, but to do so with some thoughts of compassion is nevertheless better. To be a vegetarian only on the 1st and 15th day of the month is still better than showing total ignorance of the need for vegetarianism and love of animals.

**Q2: According to biology, lives grow, reproduce, and then die. While the lives of animals follow these criteria, plants also grow, reproduce, and die. If so, why is it okay for us to eat plants and not animals? Isn't this contradictory?**



*Answer:*

Animals and plants have different types of lives. The former have a psychological life, while the latter only have a physiological one. For example, when you take the lives of animals for food, they will feel fear and will struggle; on the other hand, plants will not. Buddhism emphasizes the mind, and where there is a mind, there is the true meaning of life.

**Q3: Buddhists are usually against killing, but it is hard to prevent pests such as mosquitoes or cockroaches from entering the house, and if we do not use insecticides to remove them, our health will be jeopardized. Furthermore, without the use of crop pesticides, how can we expect a good harvest?**

*Answer:*

Regarding pests at home, you can consider other methods of prevention. For example, keeping your

home clean makes insects and bugs less likely to infest it. Another solution may be to drive them out of the house. If you absolutely must kill them, it is not considered murder because the karma of murder cannot be repented. While killing minor forms of life is still a transgression, it can nevertheless be repented.

Farmers who use insecticides do so for the purpose of protecting their crops, not to kill the bugs. While killing is an unwholesome act, farmers do not intentionally do so. Since the purpose is different, the retribution is therefore also different.

**Q4: Buddhists are against killing, yet the teachings also mention the existence of 84,000 microorganisms within a glass of water, and even insects, bacteria, and other microorganisms in the firewood that we burn. Does this mean that we should stop drinking water and making fire?**



*Answer:*

When you pick up a glass of water, are you drinking the water or are you eating the 84,000 microorganisms? When you throw a log into the fire, are you intending to make fire or are you trying to kill the insects and bugs? Your mind makes all the difference; what you think in everyday life will have a tremendous effect on the outcomes of what you do.

**Q5: In order to survive, humans must preserve good health, so they take antibiotics when they are sick. Aren't bacteria lifeforms too? Does this not mean that in the process of looking after our health, we also kill many lives?**

*Answer:*

Life exists on different levels. Bacteria are not regarded as full lifeforms. Buddhism is centered around human beings; thus, the survival of human

beings is the largest concern. Even if the need for injections or medicine is required to preserve our health, these actions are not aimed at killing lives. Therefore, from the perspective of Buddhist morality, the karmic retribution also differs in severity.

**Q6: I once killed a venomous snake and was told that I will be reborn as a snake in the future. If I kill a human being, does this mean that I get to become reborn as a human being?**

*Answer:*

This logic is incorrect. Karma is not about you killing a life and then becoming that life as a result. This is not how karmic retribution works. The outcomes of killing vary depending on your intentions. The effect of killing a snake is different from that of killing a human being. Although both involve the act of killing, the outcome cannot be regarded from the same perspective.



**Q7: Are there ghosts or spirits in this world?**

*Answer:*

There are no ghosts in this world because ghosts exist in a world of their own, just as tigers and leopards belong in the jungle, fish and prawns the ocean, insects the earth, and birds the trees. Yet, it is vital to prevent the “ghost” of suspicion from overshadowing your mind. I often say, “Do not fear the cold but the wind; do not fear poverty but debt; do not fear illness but pain; and do not fear ghosts but humans.” Sometimes, human beings are even more frightening than ghosts.

**Q8: Where are heaven and hell?**

*Answer:*

This question can be answered on three levels: Heaven is where heaven is, and hell is where hell is. Heaven and hell both exist in the human world. Try going to the markets and seeing all those animals

that are roasted, baked, hung on hooks, sliced up, and skinned. Isn't that hell? Try going to luxurious, high-rise apartments, and you will see everyone indulging in pleasure and joy. Isn't that heaven?

Heaven and hell exist in our minds. Every day, we travel back and forth between heaven and hell many times. Every thought of compassion and altruism manifests heaven, while hell exists in every thought of killing, sexual misconduct, and deceit.

**Q9: Most Buddhists believe the purpose of learning Buddhism is to find liberation. Since we have never committed any crimes and are not in prison, why should we seek to find liberation?**

*Answer:*

Human beings are usually unaware of having committed a transgression, but this does not mean that there is no transgression. For example, trespassing upon others' possessions, slandering others, and violating others' rights with one's own physical,



verbal, or mental acts are considered transgressions. Moreover, one may not see the need to tame one's afflictions, eradicate one's deluded thoughts, or find liberation from one's worries; therefore, it is necessary to seek liberation.

**Q10: Where exactly is Sakyamuni Buddha right now?**

*Answer:*

Again, we may answer this question on three levels:

The Dharma body of the Buddha is omnipresent in all of space and permeates the entire Dharma realm.

The Buddha is in your faith and in your respectful heart when you prostrate to the Buddha and practice good deeds.

The Buddha lives in your heart; as long as the mind of an ordinary being is cleansed of impurities, the moon of Bodhi wisdom shall appear before your eyes.



**Q11: Does *feng shui* have a lifetime influence on a person?**

*Answer:*

In this world, there is the way of heaven, the way of earth, the way of people, the way of sentiments, the way of the mind, and the way of matters. Although *feng shui* cannot be denied, it is nevertheless not determined by the directions of north, south, east, and west. As long as a house is well-ventilated, well-lit, well-connected, air-conditioned, and has a good view, wouldn't the house have a good *feng shui*?

**Q12: What is the Buddhist perspective on the death penalty?**

*Answer:*

People who are convicted by law are sentenced according to the seriousness of their motives and actions. Basically, if a transgression is committed, one must serve some type of sentence or receive punishment; the only exception is murder, where the death



penalty is inescapable. Why? This is cause and effect; there will be retribution to murder, so how could one escape the death penalty? However, if one committed the act of killing involuntarily, was forced by others, or it was committed during a time of war, then of course the outcome of karma will be accordingly heavy or light.

**Q13: Is there such an idea as “the end of the world” in Buddhism? What is the Buddhist perspective on this?**

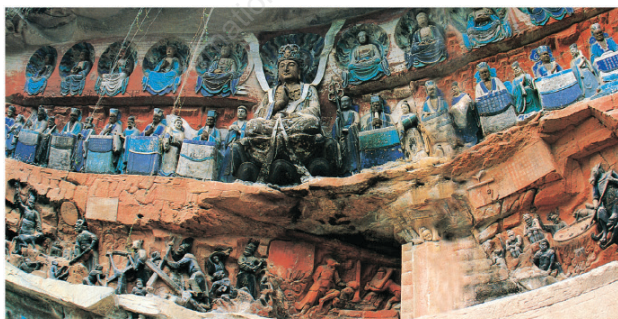
*Answer:*

In Buddhism, there is the idea of the three ages of Dharma: the Age of Right Dharma, the Age of Semblance Dharma, and the Age of Declining Dharma. In fact, the days when we see others with good conditions symbolize the Age of Right Dharma, and the times when we see others with misfortunate conditions symbolize the Age of Declining Dharma. In other words, Ages of Right or Declining Dharma are all manifestations of our karma. There is no way

of determining an exact time when the end will come, but if one is notorious for committing unwholesome acts, then the end could manifest immediately. Therefore, the Ages of Right or Declining Dharma all exist here and now.

**Q14: Some people say that “As long as I am a good person, I do not necessarily have to observe ethical precepts.” Is this correct?**

*Answer:*



Human beings travel back and forth between heaven and hell many times during the day.



Are all good people exempt from the law? Is it fine for good people to not observe precepts? Good people are called good because they obey the law and observe moral rules; this is what makes them good people.

According to the laws of a country, those who obey them are the good people, and those who break them are the bad ones. The same goes for Buddhist precepts; if you observe them, then you are considered a Buddhist; if you do not, then you are not. Only by observing precepts can you enjoy true freedom. Otherwise that freedom will be lost. If you are willing to observe the precepts, then you will not be sanctioned by law for committing a crime. Try investigating the world's prisons and you will see that the inmates are there because they committed acts of killing, violence, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, consuming intoxicants, or violating the rights of others. Should you violate a precept, how can you not expect to bear the consequences?

**Q15: Buddhism advocates the five precepts, so what should I do if I take**

**the precepts but subsequently violate them?**

*Answer:*

Regardless of whether one has formally taken the precepts or not, one's physical, verbal, and mental actions all bring about karmic effects. Therefore, even with the risk that one might violate the precepts, one should still take and observe them. Once you violate a precept you have taken, you can repent and make amends. On the contrary, to commit the acts of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants without observing the precepts or repentance has much more severe results.

**Q16: Some claim to witness good people suffering bad karmic results, while bad people enjoy good karmic consequences. Does karmic retribution really exist?**



*Answer:*

This is in fact karmic retribution. Good people may still have debts from the past that must be paid, while bad people may still have savings in the bank that they are entitled to. Nevertheless, fortune and misfortune will eventually be exhausted, just as the saying goes, “Good begets good, and bad begets bad. Karmic retributions are all a matter of time.”

The laws of good and bad karma all have supporting evidence. The Buddhist concept of cause and effect spans the three time periods. *The Cause and Effect that Spans the Three Time Periods Sutra* says, “If you wish to see your past causes, look at your present effects; if you wish to see your future effects, look at your present causes.” The effects you experience now reflect your past deeds, while your present actions will determine the effects of your experiences in the future.

**Q17: Buddhists always tell others to “follow conditions.” Isn’t this being too passive?**

*Answer:*

Every one of us exists within and lives according to causes and conditions. Going against nature and causing harm to yourself and others is not right, and unwholesome karmic retributions will certainly follow. On the contrary, if you follow the right conditions by doing good, then a fortunate future awaits. Therefore, to “follow conditions” is a more proactive and regular attitude than a passive one. When you make peace with the conditions that you follow, live according to the conditions that you follow, act according to the conditions that you follow, and settle your mind with the conditions that you follow, then good causes and attainment are only natural.

**Q18: Someone once said, “I believe in Buddhism because Buddhas and bodhisattvas have vowed to liberate sentient beings.” Does this mean that the Buddha will bless me with a successful career and good health?**



## Will he fulfill all my wishes?

*Answer:*

Buddhism is not an insurance company; you still have to be responsible for your own fortunes and misfortunes. What you sow, you will reap. Good health has its specific causes and conditions, as does wealth, desirable outcomes, longevity, and success. Specific cause, specific effect. This rule must not be mistaken or distorted.

In the *Agama* sutras, an analogy is mentioned. When the stone sinks to the bottom of the water, if you pray to god and say, “Please, let this stone float,” would that make it float? When oil floats on the surface of water, if you pray to god and say, “Please, make the oil sink to the bottom,” would that make it sink? In this way, prayers must be made with a sense of cause and effect.

Rather than asking Buddhas and bodhisattvas to fulfill your wishes, look at your own actions and see if they qualify to make your wishes come true.



**Q19: If two or three years after marriage a couple finds each other to be unsuitable, should they stay married or get divorced?**

*Answer:*

If they already have children, then they need to be patient and should keep trying to bring back the good conditions. This is the best case scenario. If the relationship is so bad that they are unable to tolerate each other anymore, then legal actions that result in a divorce are not considered ethical transgressions.

**Q20: Can fate be changed?**

*Answer:*

Fate can definitely be changed! Everything in this world is impermanent, and impermanence also means things will change. If genetic alteration for plants is possible, then why can't our blessings and misfortunes also be altered?



**Q21: This world is filled with natural disasters and man-made calamities. What should we do in order to be safe?**

*Answer:*

When faced with natural disasters and man-made calamities, there is no need to blame or resent heaven and earth for it. Can you deny the presence of cause and effect in the deeds of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying? The best way to be safe is to prevent all evil and practice all good. This way, your future will naturally change for the better.

**Q22: How can Buddhism enhance our compassion? How do we attain enlightenment?**

*Answer:*

Loving-kindness means giving others happiness, while compassion means liberating others from suffering. How do we nurture a compassionate mind?

First, we need to establish the mindset of empathy by placing ourselves in others' shoes and feeling for them. If you were in their position, how would you wish to be treated? When you place yourself in others' shoes, compassion naturally arises.

Speaking of enlightenment, read more, be reasonable, and be righteous. Once your intrinsic prajna wisdom is uncovered, then you will attain wisdom.

**Q23: Can flowers and plants attain buddhahood?**

*Answer:*

Why not focus instead on the question of whether you can attain buddhahood? Let me tell you, once you attain buddhahood, the flowers and plants will also attain buddhahood.

**Q24: Based on the theory of “natural selection” and “survival of the fittest,” some believe that killing is a necessary**



**means of survival. What is the Buddhist perspective on this matter?**

*Answer:*

This world is always half and half. There will be people who protect life and people who kill. It is impossible to unite the worlds of the Buddha and Mara. One should think of possible ways to protect life and increase good causes and conditions so as to expand the world of the Buddha and minimize Mara.

**Q25: Can fishermen who make a living out of catching fish also be Buddhists?**

*Answer:*

Of course they can! The Dharma is for all living beings. Fishermen may make a living out of catching fish, which involves the act of killing, but they may still do so without the intention to kill. If they change their career in the future and go from killing lives to protecting lives, they can still strive for a better future.

**Q26: We live on the resources of the land and ocean. If fishermen are allowed to make a living by catching fish, then why can't others make a living by catching birds?**

*Answer:*

This would be an incorrect attitude towards unwholesome deeds. If one becomes so used to catching fish that they think it is fine to also catch birds every once in a while, then they are wrong. When it comes to killing, whether it is fish or birds, it is still killing. Therefore, there is no should or should not to discuss. After all, it should be humanity's duty to cherish every life. Just try your best and do however much you can.

**Q27: If every human being renounces, becomes a monastic, and no one gets married, wouldn't the human race become extinct?**



*Answer:*

If every human being were a teacher, then there would be no students. If everyone were a shop owner, then there would be no customers. If everyone joined the army, then who would be left to farm? If everyone was an employee, then there would be no employers. There is no such thing as “if,” so it is needless to worry because the entire world would not all do or be the same thing. Just as you said, if everyone renounced and acquired the ability to liberate themselves from the cycle of birth and death, then wouldn't this world be left with nothing but peace?

**Q28: It is said that there are many Buddhas  
from the ten directions across the three**

A light offering helps illuminate the mind with compassion and wisdom.



**time periods. Amongst the infinite Buddhas, which one is the greatest?**

*Answer:*

If you are a Buddha, you will be the greatest. If she is a Buddha, she is also the greatest. Anyone with the mind of a Buddha is considered the greatest.

**Q29: Does burning paper money have an effect for the deceased?**

*Answer:*

There is no definitive answer either way, but the respect and offering from your heart will surely have their effects. For example, wouldn't you be pleased if I complimented you? Wouldn't you feel happy if





I showed respect for you? In this way, offerings of flowers or fruits, and even burning paper money in order to show one's gratitude is not entirely illegitimate.

**Q30: Is it necessary to make incense or flower offerings to the Buddha?**

*Answer:*

Respect for the Buddha does not necessarily have to be expressed by offering flowers, incense, or by making prostrations. Looking at the Buddha with reverence, circumambulating, joining your palms, or making a half bow all bear the same meaning as that of offering incense and flowers.

**Q31: Is the idea of making light offerings online legitimate?**

*Answer:*

By making an online light offering, would you feel that your mind is also illuminated? As the saying goes, "A thousand-year-long darkness is instantly



dispelled by a single lamp.” The true meaning of making a light offering is to offer your heart to the Buddha; at the same time, the purpose is to illuminate your compassion, wisdom, faith, and joy with the Buddha’s blessings. Therefore, traditional light offerings are usually made before the Buddha. That is why people are told to make an incense or light offering “in front of the Buddha.”

In the past, light offerings were done with oil lamps or candles; now, they are made with electric lights or even with virtual lights online. No matter which type you offer, the most important point is that you offer your heart to the Buddha. The purpose of light offerings is truly served only when you feel a heart-to-heart connection with the Buddha.

**Q32: I am a believer of Mazu; am I allowed to pay respect to the Buddha, too?**

*Answer:*

Even Mazu paid respect to the Buddha, so why wouldn’t you be allowed to?



**Q33: Who is the greatest religious figure in this world?**

*Answer:*

The one you most admire and believe in is the greatest.

**Q34: There is a large variety of religions in this world; which one is the best?**

*Answer:*

The one you have the greatest affinity for. The one you can relate to. The one that helps you improve and accomplish your goals. Any religion that is formally registered, recognized by the government, holds righteous beliefs, and is pure is a religion that you could consider following is the best.

**Q35: Equality is emphasized in Buddhism; does this mean parents and children in a family should be treated equally?**

*Answer:*

Equal treatment is not equality; true equality is offering treatment appropriate to peoples' roles. Grandparents should be treated with privilege, parents should be treated with respect, while the younger generation should be reminded of their responsibilities. To let children enjoy a grandparent's privilege is not equality; rather, equality is children respecting their parents, and parents caring for their children. While the treatments may be different, it is still equality.

**Q36: As a child, it is easier to be dutiful than to be obedient to one's parents. How should I be a son who has filial piety?**

*Answer:*

Indeed, while it is easy to be dutiful to one's parents, it is much harder to be a child who has filial piety. Therefore, it is also important for parents to be reasonable because while their children have



the obligation to be dutiful to them, it is not a must for the children to be obedient. There is no need to insist that your children do as you tell them; after all, it is their life, so why not give them space and freedom?

**Q37: Is it necessary for lay Buddhists to set up a Buddha shrine at home?**

*Answer:*

It is good to have a Buddha shrine at home because you will be inspired to be mindful of the Buddha. It does not matter if the setting or decoration is a simple or plain one.

**Q38: Do Buddhists have to wear chanting beads? Can these be worn inside the toilet or shower?**

*Answer:*

Real chanting beads are to be worn not on your wrist but in your mind. They can be worn in any

place just as long as your mind is pure; the nature of any matter can be changed by your mind. It will only lead to more trouble if you are overly attached or overly concerned about rules.

**Q39: Is it necessary to seek to be the first in line to strike the bell or offer incense on Chinese New Year?**

*Answer:*

This is quite superstitious. You will get your own first strike of the bell or incense offering, so why fight against others for that? Even if you miss out on making an incense offering in January, you can still come back in February, and then that will be your first incense offering of the year. You will get your first strike of the bell, while others can have their own as well.

**Q40: Do you think it is reasonable for temples to charge entrance fees?**



*Answer:*

No, it is not reasonable, because religious sites are not businesses, and they should not charge entrance fees. When followers make a donation, they do so out of their own will and faithful devotion. Furthermore, historic art and cultural relics are things past generations have bequeathed to us, and we are simply benefiting from their blessings. It is not right to add to our burden by asking us to pay a fee. In the end, where would the money go to anyway?

**Q41: Is it necessary for lay Buddhists to follow a master or guru?**

*Answer:*

Being Buddhist is taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. It is not about choosing which master to follow. The two are rather different. It is more important to befriend virtuous people than to follow a particular master or guru.

**Q42: If someone who has already taken refuge in Buddhism converts to another faith, will they be struck by lightning?**

*Answer:*

Legend has it that those who convert to another religion will be struck by lightning as a punishment. However, controlling what people believe in with divine power is not a rational idea. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas would not make a big deal out of someone converting to another religion. However, to be moral and responsible, under circumstances where you must convert, it is still appropriate for you to first explain your reason to Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

**Q43: I used to have a different religious faith, so can I still convert to Buddhism?**

*Answer:*

Converting is not such a serious matter, just as long as one converts to another righteous and moral religious faith.



**Q44: The precept against false speech concerns lying, but what about situations where one does not say what needs to be said?**

*Answer:*

To speak falsely or wrongly is false speech, but to conceal goodness is also considered false speech.

**Q45: My mental afflictions are very burdensome. Can the Buddha help me?**

*Answer:*

Turn to that Buddha in your heart, and he will have answers for you.

**Q46: I am a Buddhist. Please tell me how I can now put my faith into practice?**

*Answer:*

1) Respect the Triple Gem, 2) believe firmly in the laws of cause and effect, 3) have loving-kindness,



compassion, joy, and equanimity, 4) broadly develop good affinities, and the list goes on.

**Q47: I am old enough to retire now. How should I spend the rest of my life in retirement?**

*Answer:*

Have faith. By reading Buddhist sutras, chanting the Buddha's name, doing good deeds, making prostrations, and taking part in temple services, you will be able to start a new life.

**Q48: Must youth believe in Buddhism?**

*Answer:*

Yes. Not only are youth encouraged to develop their faith, they should also take part in religious activities to enhance their moral character.

**Q49: Do we need to pick an auspicious date to get married or move to a new house?**



*Answer:*

It is not necessary. Every day is an auspicious day; every moment is a good moment. Any day that is convenient for yourself and those involved will be a good day. There is no such thing as an inauspicious day when it comes to these matters.

**Q50: Is homosexuality acceptable?**

*Answer:*

It is good to have a close friend who understands and listens to you. However, when it comes to marriage, while in Chinese ethics homosexuality is not accepted, the response is arbitrary when it comes to moral ethics, the law, and public opinion.

**Q51: If someone loses the will to live and commits suicide, is this considered an ethical transgression?**

*Answer:*

Committing suicide is just a form of killing a human being. There is no reason why you should end a valuable human life, whether it is your own or another's.

**Q52: Is there a soul after we die? Where does that soul go?**

*Answer:*

There is definitely a continuity of consciousness that wanders about like a traveler who will eventually find a new home, a new life.

**Q53: Is there cyclic rebirth after death in this world?**

*Answer:*

Of course there is. Isn't the cycle of spring, summer, autumn, and winter rebirth? Isn't the cycle of old age, sickness, and death, followed by rebirth a



form of cyclic existence? When you turn from east to south, west, and then north, haven't you turned in a cycle already?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The fifty-three questions listed above certainly are not enough to cover all the questions I have been asked over the past seventy years. In the future, if conditions allow, perhaps a book on a thousand questions can be published.

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