

The Importance of Causes and Conditions in this World

人間因緣的重要

Hear Me Out 貧僧有話要說系列

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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."



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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*' 15th 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.

Haing yun

May 16th, 2015 Fo Guang Shan Monastery, Founding Master's Quarters



The Importance of Causes and Conditions in this World

Causes and conditions exist within personal relations, as do true wealth and wisdom.



There is a popular saying, "Keep your eyes on the prize." People often use this referring to money, but the question here is whether or not money is really that important.

Other than money, there are many things in the world for us to set our eyes on. Some people like to set their eyes on mountains, water, people, or books; others like to set their eyes on performances, interesting people and matters, television programs, the newspaper, or the internet. There are many of these things, but I wonder why people do not like to set their eyes on "causes and conditions."

Before I grew old and my vision weakened, my eyes worked well. From a very early age, I set my eyes on the whole world and its sufferings and tribulations; in other words, what I truly enjoy setting my eyes on is the Path. What is the Path? It is causes and conditions; it is Dharma; it is Buddhism.

Introspect: Discover One's Greed, Anger, and Ignorance

During the first ten years of my humble monastic life, because I was so poor, there was no money in sight; I had no idea where money would come from but it never mattered anyway. Each day after I renounced, all that I looked at were statues of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats; I also looked at majestic shrines, the sutras, my teachers, and my fellow students.

I discovered the things we see can be quickly forgotten. For example, I cannot see something that is too far away or something hidden behind a wall; even an incident I have seen with my own eyes will eventually be forgotten or will seem different after some time. In fact, I realized that it is better to hear something than to see it; when my teachers talked about history or Buddhist concepts, I thoroughly enjoyed listening to them.

Later, I slowly realized that the sensory perceptions of seeing and listening—the objects of form, sound, smell, taste, and touch acquired by the subjects



of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—are ultimately unreal. In the end, all that I have seen or heard never really concerned me. A teacher once slapped me in the face and said, "What are you looking at? What in this world is truly yours?" Indeed, nothing in this world is truly mine. Therefore, I closed my eyes and stopped looking for several months, until my teacher taught me to look at my own mind instead. What does my mind look like? I cannot see it either. Although my teacher hit and scolded me, he was also very compassionate for teaching me to look at my own mind and examine what is found within.

Once I examined my mind, I realized that it was full of transgressions, greed, ignorance, anger, and jealousy. It was so bad that I could not bear to look at it anymore because it was uglier than a mind that covets wealth and pleasure. I had a jealous mind, a greedy mind, a bitter mind, and an ignorant mind. By then I was already 1.8 meters tall, but the realization made me feel so small because everyone else was better and bigger than me. I felt so ashamed because not only was I poor, I was ugly.

Setting a Goal: Taming the Mind with Meditation and Chanting Buddha's Name

Nevertheless, my compassionate teacher continued to guide me by saying, "You can cure your jealousy with respect and tolerance; your greed with loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity; your hatred with gentleness and thoughtfulness; and your ignorance with understanding causes and conditions as well as reason." From then on, I felt completely changed as I discovered the goal of raising my perspectives and broadening my horizons.

The days of my traveling studies gave me different perspectives on society, life, the five desires, and the six sensory fields. Up until this point, I had desired a good reputation more than wealth. I wished for others to see me as a good person, as someone who had a wholesome character, and as someone who outshined others. But as I neared the age of thirty, my views were once again completely changed.



It turns out that as an individual, I am very insignificant and so should not be selfish. As a monastic, all that I do must be for Buddhism and for all living beings, just as the saying goes, "I shall regard Dharma propagation as my duty, and benefiting living beings as my work." Confucians speak of being well-established at age thirty. While I could not say if I was established or not, one thing that I am sure of is that we must create our own causes and conditions for growth. Having dedicated my existence to the monastery and having left my life in the hands of heavenly guardians, I no longer cared for personal gains; instead, the only goal left in my mind was to strive for a better future for Buddhism.

While my material life was rather meager, my spiritual life was made abundant by the practices of laying prostrations, meditation, and chanting the Buddha's name. I felt that there was now a direction: to develop affinities with people. I also felt that I had a goal and that I had the whole world. When I was writing *The Biography of Sakyamuni Buddha*, I came to understand that

the Buddha attained enlightenment while sitting on the diamond throne beneath the bodhi tree and that he became awakened to the law of dependent origination.

The concept of causes and conditions may seem very simple. For example, when people relate well to one another, they say, "There is great affinity between us!" If not, they say "There is no affinity," or "people from distant lands meet because of their past affinity." In fact, causes and conditions are not that simple; the prerequisites for the Earth's formation and the survival of humanity need many conditions.

It turns out that the Buddha realized dependent origination and the emptiness of nature, which means that emptiness is the foundation of existence, phenomenon cannot arise without a principle, and effect originates from cause. The Buddha was a human being; think about how many causes and conditions were required in order for him to attain Buddhahood.



Being Content with Poverty and Taking Joy in the Path: The Most Important Condition

The first time I ever saw a car, I was in my teens; I never saw a light bulb until I was twenty-six. At thirty, I did not even own a briefcase; wherever I went, I carried a cloth bundle with two shirts wrapped inside. In fact, I was always poor, but I never considered poverty to be a kind of suffering. I have Buddhism to thank for this. The early years of training cultivated my character of wanting and desiring little; no external temptations could move me. At this point in my life, I was already firmly established in "being content with poverty and taking joy in the Path."

After I renounced, my master never gave me any money or bought me new clothes. He kept me in a state of poverty, which was one of the many good causes and conditions that he gave me. He nurtured my habit of not spending and my ideal of living simply and frugally. I am grateful to my

master for giving me such good causes and conditions, which helped me settle within the Buddhist sangha. I am truly thankful for my master's good intentions.

Corporal punishment, reprimands, injustice, humiliation, the beating of my palms, and kneeling were the usual ways my teachers taught. It turned out that these methods were all intended to help us grow. Our teachers bore no grudge against us, so why would they hit or scold us? As the saying goes, "The deeper the love, the greater the demand." All they wished was for us to become outstanding Buddhists; therefore, they were willing to bear the burden of inflicting corporal punishment. It turned out that these punishments were the fertilizer and soil that helped us grow and shine like fragrant flowers and sweet fruits. It was not until my thirties that I began to understand the meaning of causes and conditions.



Gaining a Clear Sight of Causes and Conditions: Remaining Unmoved

Had I remained in Mainland China instead of coming to Taiwan, a decade of hardship and adversity would have awaited me. I must thank Venerable Zhiyong for providing the causes and conditions for me to be brought to Taiwan, which allowed me to avoid persecution during the Cultural Revolution. I am grateful for these causes and conditions.

Chu Bosi and his wife were a Chinese Vietnamese couple. All I ever gave them was a small amount of financial aid, but what they gave in return was the land where Fo Guang Shan Monastery now stands as a home to monastics and laypeople alike. It is also a center which strives to let the Buddha's Light shine universally and the Dharma stream flow eternally. Is this not a good cause and a good condition?

I can still remember what Yen Hsi-shan said when he served as the Premier of the Republic of China, "As human beings, we must never be moved by money, love, temptations, threats, or blackmail. Otherwise, money will crush us, love will put shackles on us, and threats will frighten us." In a humble monk's opinion, if we can gain an insight into the ways of causes and conditions and understand that all conditions will arise and extinguish, then we can remain unmoved by the world. Look not only to money but also to causes and conditions. Within these causes and conditions there are assembly, the world, and personal relations. True wealth, a life of Dharma, and wisdom exist within causes and conditions.

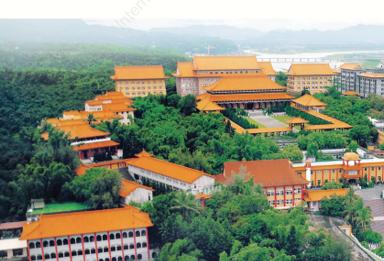
Detachment to Money: An Old Habit

I enjoyed reading books, yet I could not afford to buy any; I enjoyed traveling and learning, but could not afford travel expenses. All I ever wanted to do was to contribute to Buddhism by establishing educational institutes, protecting Buddhism, bringing the Dharma to people, and offering a home to monastics, yet I had no money to do so. These are moments when money becomes very important in life, but no one is to be blamed for my poverty. I alone am the



one who lacks the conditions to acquire wealth, and there is nothing I can do about this. Nevertheless, life is amazing. When you lack the necessary conditions, even a duck you prepare and roast can fly away by the hands of your guests, but when the right conditions are present, though you may not seek something such as money, it will come to you.

I remember when I stayed at Pu Men Temple in Taipei thirty years ago, an elderly woman took out one hundred thousand New Taiwan dollars and forcefully stuffed them into my robe pocket. She said in a harsh voice, "This is for you, not for Fo Guang Shan!"



As grateful as I was for her kindness, everything this humble monk does is for Fo Guang Shan, so how could I selfishly accept such a generous offering? At Fo Guang Shan, those with authority do not manage money; only those with junior rankings are given the task to do so. A clear line is drawn between authority over and access to money. For this reason, I still handed the offering to the monastery so it could be used for construction purposes. I understood that causes and conditions are not exclusive to any individual but are in the entire community. We live as a part of the community, and we also live in causes and conditions.

Panoramic view of Fo Guang Shan Monastery.





Once, I was waiting at the Hong Kong International Airport, and I wandered into the duty free shops. I saw something very useful in the stationery shop, so I decided to buy it. However, I carried no cash. Then, I saw Venerable Tzu Hui approaching from afar, so I asked her to lend me fifty Hong Kong Dollars. She asked me what it was for, and I pointed at the stationery. She curtly replied, "Oh, there are lots of those in Taiwan." She was probably busy with other matters, so she left.

I felt quite lost and disappointed then, and I felt that being without money was not such a good thing after all. In the future, I thought I should carry at least some money so that I would not have to receive cold shoulders like this. Nevertheless, I was born with such a character that, even close to ninety, I still keep the habit of not wanting and accumulating any money.

However, to say that I have no money is not entirely correct. Though I was determined not to build any temple, when I was forty, to provide a place for young students to settle and study, I had to build a

Buddhist College. The interesting thing was, once thoughts about building a Buddhist college arose, many causes and conditions began to arise, allowing me to receive a barren plot of land to construct Fo Guang Shan upon.

Vowing to Construct a Temple: Support from All Directions

When Fo Guang Shan was completed, water was urgently needed. However, where was I to find water on a hill? Suddenly, a stranger from Chiayi named Wu Ta-hai offered to extract water from a deep well by the Gaoping River so everyone at the monastery could use it. With much gratitude to the causes and conditions he had given me, I named the water tower after him: "The Water of Ta-hai (great sea)."

When pricey cement was needed, Uni-President's Wu Hsiu-chi from Tainan came and told me that his Universal Cement Corporation could provide all the cement. Once construction was complete, I had no money to buy paint, but Chang Yun Wang-chueh,



owner of Kaohsiung's renowned company Rainbow Paints, offered to provide all the paint I needed for free. Pan Hsiao-jui, CEO of Nan Feng Steel Enterprise Co., even handed me a seal and guaranteed that with it I could withdraw all the money I needed from the bank. I have kept this seal for many years but never actually used it because even if good causes and conditions are present, I still should not take them for granted.

In this way, this humble monk was not poor anymore. It was as if any wish could be fulfilled at will. Fo Guang Shan stood over a land that comprised deep valleys and ravines, and even commoners who owned nothing but wagons offered to transport one hundred or two hundred loads of sandstones for me. As early as fifty years ago, although unsure where the environmentalist ideas came from, I still planted trees, forested the hills, did slope protection and conserved water and soil in order to protect the uneven land.

Virtuous Benefactors from Various Continents: Manifestations of Guanyin

I once helped Shen Chia-ming, Director General of the Taiwan Forestry Bureau, resolve a family matter. Out of his gratitude, he exercised his authority and encouraged me to rent a piece of land where I could construct a temple for people. He even assigned a few directors to show me the locations where the Taipei Veterans General Hospital, the Chungshan Building on Yangming Shan, and the Bank of Taiwan Staff Quarters in Wulai of New Taipei City now stand, and he told me that I could rent these lands from the Bureau. I looked at these sites and realized that most were forests, and back then, I could not even afford to buy an axe or saw to cut down a single tree. I had no choice but to decline such a good cause and condition.

A few years later, when I founded Fo Guang Shan Monastery, Shen came to me angrily and asked why I would choose an ugly place over those good sites offered by the Bureau to build a temple. He questioned how much it would cost me to build a



monastery here. I replied, "I am grateful for such a good cause and condition, but those lands are owned by the country. I do not have the merit to accept them. I cannot even afford the lease! You may think this is an ugly place, but just as long as we are determined, there is no need to fear anything in the future. I will take my time with the construction, and one day it is bound to be completed. A Pure Land cannot be made possible without the resolution to build it."

Upon hearing this, he had no choice but to say, "Fine! You may choose to build a temple, so let me donate the trees." For this reason, Fo Guang Shan has been free from disputes since none of the land is owned by the nation. After that came the bodhi trees donated by Wu Hsiu-chi, as well as Indian rosewood and mahogany trees by Shen Chia-ming so Fo Guang Shan could be covered in greenery.

As Fo Guang Shan continued to develop, many benefactors provided supporting conditions as if they were the Thousand-hand-and-thousand-eye Avalokitesvara. Across the decades, these kind people were always ready to respond to needs by offering help, such as: Chang Yao Hong-ying, Lai Wei-cheng, Lee Mei-hsiu, Chen Cheng-nan, and Wang Jia-pei from America; Henry Yau, and Liu Chao-ming from Australia; Yan Foon Gu, Yu Sheng-ching, Tsai Hutie, Lucio Tan, Hu Yang Xinhui, Tsai Chi-jui, Chen Tseng Si-shin, Chiang Chen Hsi-mei, Hong Chiang Wu-wei, Pai Ching-tong, Chen Lin Yun-chiao, and Zhan Shu-feng.

There are also those like Wu Poh-hsiung, Chao Li-yun, Pan Weikang, Tsao Chung-gih, Koo Chenfu, Yu Chen Yueh-ying, Yung Chaurshin, Lin Tsongming, Chai Sung-lin, Tian Yu-lin, Tian Qing, Liu Changle, and Zhang Jingzhi, who, in their own fields, have contributed many supporting conditions for various undertakings of Humanistic Buddhism: education, culture, Dharma functions, and charity. There are many others who have offered good causes and conditions, and some have even passed on their faith to their next generations to ensure their family's continued support. I am unable to list everyone by name, and I can only offer my deepest gratitude and the blessings in my heart.



For every grain and bowl of porridge that this humble monk has been given, they all come from the causes and conditions offered by others; without them. I would not have food to satisfy my hunger. The clothes that this humble monk has donned throughout the years are few; yet, I wear every piece with a heart full of gratitude for the various causes and conditions. As the saying goes: "We should bear in mind that every bowl of porridge and every grain of rice does not come easily; we should constantly remember that every yarn and thread are materials obtained with painstaking effort." Without these many causes and conditions, how could I have survived to this day? Without these many causes and conditions, how would it be possible to have the Fo Guang Shan we see before us today?

Therefore, we regard all patrons of Fo Guang Shan as advantageous causes and conditions, and those who criticize us we regard as causes and conditions that facilitate our development. Regardless of whether the causes and conditions are positive or negative, they are always a source of help and encouragement; they are all supportive factors for us. In the midst of causes and conditions, we understand the relationships between the universe, others, and ourselves. We come to be wise, understanding, rational, and not confused or unrighteous, the latter two being the results of understanding causes and conditions. If we have the right knowledge and view of causes and conditions, we will be able to avoid making mistakes.

I am aware that since I do not qualify to be poor, naturally I cannot seek to be addressed as such. However, upon reflection, everything at Fo Guang Shan comes from the causes and conditions of all directions instead of something that is owned by me. I continue to live a life of simplicity, detachment, and frugality. Although I am not truly a monk who lives a humble life, I am still humble at heart. In fact, I still have affinities in this world. In my own mind, causes and conditions mean that I have the Truth; to have the Truth means that I have the entire world. For this reason, I would like to remind the whole world to look to causes and conditions instead of to money.

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