

**STUDIES ON  
HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM Ⅳ**

**HUMAN LIFE  
人間佛教研究論文選**

Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, Taiwan  
and  
Nan Tien Institute, Australia

# VENERABLE MASTER HSING YUN'S PERSPECTIVE ON HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM'S LIFE EDUCATION

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## **Source**

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Venerable Master Hsing Yun is the most important practitioner promoting the development of the contemporary Humanistic Buddhism movement. After arriving in Taiwan, he devoted himself to various causes aimed at maintaining the Dharma in the human world. This has entailed extensive practical efforts for its realization, focused specifically on six aspects: 1. popularizing Buddhism 2. propagating Buddhism 3. Buddhist education 4. establishing culture 5. building Dharma centers and 6. charitable works.

With respect to these specific aspects, his insights into questions concerning life education in Humanistic Buddhism are unique, as elaborated further in the following.

## **1. The theoretical foundation for life education in Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism**

1.1 The classical Greek philosopher Socrates famously said, "know thyself." It is important to know oneself. According to Buddhist teachings, it is rare to be born as a human. The Buddha said, "All sentient beings possess the wisdom and virtue of the Tathāgata." Among the Six Realms, those in the human realm have the best opportunity to practice the Dharma. Sentient beings that cannot practice the Dharma cannot achieve liberation. There are three types of people. The first type leads a busy life, unable to get rich, and not encountering the Dharma. Even if they come across Buddhist teachings, they would miss the great opportunity due to a lack of wisdom. The second type of person has status and power, but does not generally encounter the Dharma. Even if they do encounter Buddhism, they have no interest in it and therefore do not pursue the Dharma. The third type of person can hear the Dharma and is willing to practice it. The last type of person can become enlightened.

1.2 People should conduct themselves with compassion and wisdom. People are part of nature, and the human and natural world have an intrinsic and inseparable connection. The nobility of human life does

not come from a greater right to flourish or a superior evolutionary status, but from the human capacity for compassion and wisdom. Venerable Master Hsing Yun said, “Wisdom gives us perspective on life; it is profound, and is the crystallization of our experiences. Compassion is the highest human feeling; it is benevolent solicitude, an expression of reciprocity. Wisdom and compassion are the treasures of the human world.”<sup>1</sup> All the major themes of Buddhist learning, in essence, concern teaching people how to conduct themselves properly. We must have compassion and wisdom. Compassion is the foundation of the Buddha path. Compassion benefits all beings, alleviates suffering and brings joy. Wisdom is the objective of the Buddha path. Wisdom dispels ignorance and realizes awakening. As the adage goes, a Buddhist is informed to “practice compassion and wisdom simultaneously.”

## **2. Key points for the practice of life education in Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism**

2.1 Cultivate yourself and perfect life. Life is a journey of spiritual cultivation. The greatest struggle one has to face is surmounting one’s weaknesses such as indolence, laziness, greed, anger, envy, and arrogance. Venerable Master Hsing Yun said, “Each day’s worth of practice is each day’s worth of merit. Each day’s share of negligence is each day’s share of vanity. True practice is found in everyday life, because the Buddha is nowhere but life itself.”<sup>2</sup> To be pure and tranquil in body and mind, individuals should frequently practice the threefold training of morality, meditation, and wisdom to ameliorate the Three Poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. According to Venerable Master Hsing Yun, “Non-self is the first thing to learn in Buddhism, as ignorance originates from self-attachment. The light of truth will shine on those who can relinquish attachment to the body and mind and become selfless.”<sup>3</sup> Thoughts arise in the mundane mind, but all thoughts originate in the transcendental mind. Actions, whether wholesome or unwholesome, arise from a moment

of thought. Therefore, spiritual practice should pay attention to cultivation of the mind. Venerable Master Hsing Yun has stated that all afflictions originate in the mind, and that the six sense organs act as thieves. One should constantly self-reflect and avoid dwelling on the six sense objects. Do not look at, listen to, speak of, or do anything improper so that afflictions and delusions will not arise and karma will not be created. One can be free from afflictions and fear by frequently reflecting and repenting and not creating bad karma.

- 2.2 Treat all sentient beings well, with care and devotion. In striving for personal spiritual cultivation, one should consider the interests of all sentient beings. For this reason, Venerable Master Hsing Yun proposed the easily understood principles of the “Three Acts of Goodness,” “Four Givings,” and “Five Harmonies.” Specifically, the Three Acts of Goodness are “do good deeds, speak good words, and think good thoughts.” The Four Givings are “to give others confidence, to give others joy, to give others hope, and to give others convenience.” The Five Harmonies are “individual harmony achieved through joy, interpersonal harmony achieved through respect, family harmony achieved through deference, social harmony achieved through cooperation, and world harmony achieved through peace.” Among these principles, the phrase “to give joy to others” will greatly inspire others. With this in mind, when others ask something of us, we can be empathetic, creating a heart full of joy for both.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun has said that true spiritual practice is being mindful of the existence of sentient beings, and being willing to work hard to serve them. The reason people have so much worry is that they care too much about personal gains and losses. If we change our mindset, stop clinging to the small self, are mindful of all sentient beings and have care for them, and dedicate ourselves to serving all sentient beings with magnanimity, then what we think and what we reap from those thoughts will be very different. Venerable Master Hsing Yun taught us to broadly develop good affinities. If we

avoid forcing people to do things, going against them, and imposing on them, but are always kind to others, then we are able to broadly develop good affinities with others. If today we help others achieve good causes and conditions, later others will help us do the same. When you are able to follow and oblige, constantly cultivating good causes and conditions, you will receive blessings and have your wishes come true.” Helping others is to help yourself; serving all sentient beings is to be true to yourself.

### **3. The ideal goal of life education in Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism**

3.1 Live a happy life. Unlike some traditional Buddhist concepts, Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s understanding of life is infused with care for the present lifetime, adding joy and positivity. He has always wanted to change the public impression that Buddhism is inherently associated with suffering; for example, that a lay person cannot happily enjoy a life of marriage and childbirth, that monastics must be vegetarian, that one must get up very early every morning to go to the temple to worship the Buddha, that one should not watch television in the evening and that entertainment is not permitted, etc. In the eyes of the secular world, such precepts seem intimidating! However, every visitor to the Fo Guang Shan Temple (or place of spiritual practice built according to the Fo Guang Shan’s philosophy, such as the ancestral Dajue Temple in Yixing, Jiangsu, China), can feel both the liveliness and peacefulness of these places. These temples are like a pure land on earth, where everyone is so harmonious and happy that one cannot help feeling respectful. Venerable Master Hsing Yun said, “Buddhism is a religion that gives joy to the people. The Buddha’s teaching of compassion is to relieve the suffering of sentient beings and give them happiness.”<sup>4</sup> Both monastics and householders need happiness. Happiness becomes an ideal to pursue. Allowing yourself to be happy, you help make others happy as well.

3.2 Create a beautiful world. Our current world is not beautiful. There are constant disputes between countries, each fighting for its own interests. The gap between rich and poor is clearly widening, with causes of social instability increasing. Large-scale urban development has severely damaged the natural environment and led to increasing air pollution. The quality of life of the people is at risk. All of this originates from people's inability to properly understand the value and meaning of their own lives, as well as the lives of all sentient beings. Humanity desires a beautiful world, but to have a beautiful world requires the active participation of each person in its creation. Venerable Master Hsing Yun encourages us to, "Always look on sentient beings with compassionate eyes. Pay attention to others, give them comfort and admiration. We should always have good words of encouragement and praise to make others happy. We should always wear a smile on our face to show our compassion and generosity. Compassionate eyes, a smiling face, and kind words make a pure land on earth."<sup>5</sup> If everyone makes an effort toward their own spiritual cultivation and treats sentient beings with kindness, then we can achieve a world full of delight, wealth, compassion, morality, harmony, respect, and the universal Mahāyāna teaching. Creating this beautiful world of the Buddha's pure land is our ultimate goal.

## Notes

- 1 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Humble Table, Wise Fare* (佛光山菜根譚), volume 3 "The Principles of Conducting Oneself with Integrity when Handling Affairs (做人處事的原則)," number 050. A copy can be found online at [masterhsingyun.org](http://masterhsingyun.org). -Ed.
- 2 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Humble Table, Wise Fare* (佛光山菜根譚), volume 1 "Encouraging Spiritual Practice through Meditation (勵志修行證悟)," number 002. A copy can be found online at [masterhsingyun.org](http://masterhsingyun.org). -Ed.
- 3 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Humble Table, Wise Fare* (佛光山菜根譚), volume 1 "Greed and Anger, Emotions and Ethics (貪瞋感情是非)," number 002. A copy can be found online at [masterhsingyun.org](http://masterhsingyun.org). -Ed.
- 4 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "Buddha in the Human World," in *Selected Humanistic Buddhism Prefaces*, available at <http://hbreader.org/wenji/renjianfojiaoxuwen135.html>. 《人間佛教序文選》《人間的佛陀》序：佛教在人間 -Ed.
- 5 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "Pure Land Thought and Modern Life (3)," in *Humanistic Buddhism Series (9)-Study of the Chan and Pure Land Schools*, available at <http://hbreader.org/wenji/renjianfojiaoxilie9.html>. 《人間佛教系列9—禪學與淨土》淨土思想與現代生活 (三) -Ed.

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