

Venerable Master Chin Kung: What is wisdom? What is ignorance?

(The Infinite Life Sutra records,) '(People in this world are) ignorant (of sages' teachings) but consider themselves to be wise. (They) do not know where they were from before birth and where they will be going after death. They are unkind and do not follow (their originally pure nature), but still hope for a long life.' These few sentences explain the pain of being ignorant (of sages' teachings). The Chinese characters '蒙昧 mengmei' mean ignorance. But these people do not realise (that they are ignorant). They think that they are wise. This is extremely foolish indeed. They mistake ignorance for wisdom. They utterly have no idea of what true wisdom is. They think that they are clever and able. So, they mistakenly think themselves to be wise. This is exactly because of their foolishness. (Consequently,) they generate karma.

Speaking of this, for those who truly (want to) learn to be the Buddha, I hope that we all aim for gaining rebirth (in the Pure Land) and no longer want to stay in the cycle of Six Realms. If we have this awakening, then we must be very circumspect and careful. We must clearly understand what wisdom is and what foolishness is. If there is selfishness, a wish to seek fame or profit, greed, anger, arrogance or ignorance (of sages' teachings) in our thoughts, then we are definitely foolish. Those who are new to Buddhism might not know what wisdom is. (Basically,) any thought or action that renders us to generate karma is foolish. Had we not been foolish, how could we possibly generate karma?

From this aspect, we will be able to tell if we are foolish or wise. If there is no self, no selfishness, no greed, no anger, no arrogance and no ignorance (of sages' teachings) in what we think, speak and act, this is wisdom. We definitely will not do things wrong. The benchmark for right and wrong is our original nature. In other words, our thoughts, speech and actions should be in line with our original nature.

What is our original nature? It is the Ten Good Deeds, the Five Precepts, following the Triple Gems, and the Six Principles. I speak of these four categories of practice. They are the most basic practices. Being in line with these four categories is original nature. Being in conflict with them is foolishness. We learn to be the Buddha and we practise. (But) what do we practise? The Buddha is not selfish. The Buddha does not argue with other people. The Buddha has no greed, no anger, no arrogance and no ignorance (of sages' teachings). The Buddha does not seek fame or profit. If we want to learn to be the Buddha, we must learn to be like him. Not only did he tell us (what the right things are), but also did them himself.

In his entire life Sakyamuni Buddha could adapt to whatever situation and found peace. Everything was all right (to him). Favourable situations were all right (to him). Unfavourable situations were also all right (to him). Good people are all right. Bad people are also all right. In his mind there was no differentiation. Why was there no differentiation? Because the original nature (of all beings) is the same. The original nature is Buddha and it is wonderful. Any difference that is bad is the result of (bad) habits. Our habits are not our original nature. Our habits change, but our original nature does not change. Mistakes caused by habits are temporary and they should be forgiven. People do wrong things due to temporary foolishness.

If we are awakened (to the truth), clearly understand (the truth), repent and correct our mistakes, and never make the same mistakes again, we will then return to our originally pure nature. We will be the same as good people, sages, Buddhas and bodhisattvas. It is why Buddhas and bodhisattvas guide us to look at people's originally pure nature, but not their habits. We should look at people's originally pure nature, but not what is bad about them. Only by practising this, can we escape from the three realms and the cycle of birth and death. The most terrifying thing for a person is that they do (wrong) things due to foolishness and ignorance, yet they still think they are wise and clever. This is utterly wrong. It is why (the annotation states that) 'They think they are right. This is extremely foolish indeed.'

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