

The Mindset of Buddhist Learning: Only by Rectifying Improper Learning Attitudes Can One Connect with the True Dharma

Preface

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Originating Conditions [for publishing this book]

In the seventeenth century, the prevailing understanding of the heart in European medical circles was that “[f]ood is transformed into blood in the heart, maintaining the body’s temperature. The heart produces the energy needed for life.” However, the English doctor William Harvey maintained a skeptical attitude toward the medical theories of his time. He believed that seeking truth by oneself was better than blindly following authorities. With this spirit, he spent nine years developing the theory of “blood circulation throughout the body,” which established the theoretical foundation for cardiology in the medical field. This also corrected misconceptions that had persisted in medicine for 2,000 years: that the heart had thinking functions and emotional responses, and that it produced the energy needed for life.

The astronomer Copernicus also willingly risked fatal consequences for himself by challenging an authoritative theory of his time: the geocentric model endorsed by the Christian Church, which asserted that Earth is the center of the universe. Instead, he proposed the heliocentric theory—the idea that the Sun is the center of the universe—for the sake of seeking truth rather than blindly following authority. Although we now know that the Sun is not the center of the universe but is just an ordinary star in the Milky Way, which is not the center of the universe either, Copernicus took the most difficult and most important step in the human journey of understanding the universe: daring to go against the Christian Church’s pronouncement regarding what the center of the universe is.

Learning Buddhism should also embody the spirit of pursuing truth. I frequently

hear practitioners from various prominent exoteric and esoteric Buddhist centers in Taiwan report that authoritative masters tell them not to read Xiao Pingshi's books, that Xiao Pingshi's teachings are heterodox and should not be studied because those who will do so will fall into hell, and that Xiao Pingshi deliberately slanders the Three Jewels and is an extremely arrogant and reckless person.

However, discerning Buddhist learners can raise the following questions to clarify their doubts: What is Buddhism truly about? Should I simply follow what others say, or should I investigate more deeply to determine whether the reading of Master Xiao's books should really be forbidden? Why do Master Xiao's Dharma teachings differ completely from those of other monastics and lay practitioners in Taiwan's Buddhist community, with the exception of Elder Venerable Guangqin (廣欽老和尚)? Why do those masters, after their teachings are refuted by Master Xiao, not dare to come forward and defend their positions? If there are really errors in Master Xiao's books, don't the masters have a responsibility to read the books carefully themselves and then explain to their students what the errors in them are and how Master Xiao's teachings in his books contradict the teachings of the Buddha, for which **exact** reason Master Xiao's books should not be read?

If the revered masters being criticized cannot do the foregoing, then practitioners should adopt an inquisitive mindset and ask themselves the following questions: Aren't the Three Jewels of Buddhism—especially the Dharma-jewel—what Dharma masters residing in the Tathāgata's home should really be protecting? Why do these masters allow layman Xiao Pingshi to openly challenge and refute in his books that their Dharma teachings are incorrect? If Master Xiao's teachings do not align with the Buddha's words, isn't it the duty of Dharma masters to dispel the falsehood of such teachings and uphold truth? They claim that Master Xiao's teachings are erroneous, but why are they unwilling to come forward and actively refute and dismiss Master Xiao's Dharma? Why are they unwilling to come forward and rescue the many Buddhist learners allegedly being misled by Master Xiao? The reason for this is obvious.

The renowned masters heading major Buddhist organizations are unable to

engage publicly in doctrinal debate. Instead, they simply tell their four assemblies of followers in private not to read or study Xiao Pingshi's teachings. What is their reason for this, and what is the truth behind their actions?

All sentient beings inherently possess a complete Buddhist canon (*Dàzàng jīng*, 大藏經)—perfectly manifest and entirely complete. It is neither more abundant in those born as humans nor diminished in those born as animals; nor is it comprehensible only to monastics residing in temples. The eight minds of consciousness [*vijñāna*] that the Buddha spoke of in the scriptures as being possessed by all sentient beings are not exclusively found in those who cultivate Buddhism; nor do practitioners who, as a result of their cultivation, deny the existence of the eighth consciousness [*ālaya-vijñāna*] or the seventh consciousness [*manas*] lack these consciousnesses.

Therefore, I sincerely and earnestly advise wise Buddhist practitioners to reflect on the following words and heed them: The principle that “one cannot cook sand to make rice” is not something that cannot be verified. One should examine whether the thoughtless and pristine awareness of the conscious mind is truly what the Buddha referred to as the mind that is not a mind, the Bodhisattva mind, the intrinsic limit of *nirvāṇa*, the suchness, and the mind of neither-arising-nor-ceasing.

Thoroughly investigating the aforementioned matter is not difficult. By examining the inherent Buddhist canon (*Dàzàng jīng*) that each of us possesses within our minds, along with the small booklet written by Master Xiao, *Buddhist Disciples' Reflection: An Easy Way to Identify True from False Enlightenment*, we can verify this for ourselves. Should we have any doubts, we may approach monastics or lay practitioners with whom we have established rapport, seeking their guidance and clarification regarding the doctrinal principles presented in this book. If doubts remain, we may accompany the monastics or lay practitioners we have consulted at the True Enlightenment Lecture Hall of the True Enlightenment Practitioners Association for joint dharma discussion. This will establish correct knowledge and views not only for ourselves but also for future practitioners of the Buddhahood Path—truly a fortunate circumstance for the Buddhist community.

I have engaged in discussions with several individuals who cultivate Buddhism at other practice centers. In the course of these discussions, I have found that certain practitioners actually possess considerable wisdom but lack the favorable conditions to further clarify their doubts. Inspired by these observations and to enable more Buddhist learners to truly understand the definitive true Dharma taught by Master Xiao and to obtain the correct answers to common questions that arise when reading his books, I have compiled these discussions into written form. Additionally, discussing these matters can arouse an investigative mind and a mind that pursues truth during practitioners' Buddhist cultivation. Thus, I have arranged these dialogues in textual form, hoping to assist sincere Buddhist aspirants in entering the true cultivational Path to the Enlightenment of Buddhahood.

This book was written to benefit present and future generations of Buddhist practitioners, and this preface was composed to elucidate the book's originating conditions for its publication.

Humbly yours,

Sun Zhengde, with palms joined

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at the True Enlightenment Lecture Hall