

從《人生卜事》探討人間佛教的信仰觀

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中文摘要

《人生卜事》是星雲大師依生命經驗口述的108則法語，希望佛法能在人有困境時，乃至日常生活中，做心靈上的指南。《人生卜事》的設計與用法看起來像算命，違背表面上的佛教教義；但是所謂的「卜事」不是占卜，而是透過對因果的釐清、身口意的淨化來改變人的命運。此設計受大眾的喜愛，展現星雲大師人間佛教的信仰觀。星雲大師針對當代迷信的引導，對比佛陀時代吠陀的祭祀儀式之教義，有多方面的相似之處，能看出星雲大師弘法的善巧方便。另外，本文旨在探討《人生卜事》如何引導人的正確信仰：從充滿迷信、恐懼，及個人慾望的信仰，到慈悲、智慧、利益眾生的菩薩道。

關鍵字：人間佛教 星雲大師 「人生卜事」 占卜 迷信 信仰



A Discussion on "Faith" in Humanistic Buddhism as Exemplified by Venerable Master Hsing Yun's "Positive Forecasts for Life"

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Abstract

Introduced to the public in 2012, "Positive Forecasts for Life" is a series of 108 Dharma Words narrated by Venerable Master Hsing Yun to help guide people in times of uncertainty and in daily life. Designed with widespread appeal in mind, "Positive Forecasts for Life" appears to be an imitation of current popular divinatory practices to predict the future, which are seemingly contrary to the Buddhist teachings on the surface. However, the use of "forecasting" in "Positive Forecasts for Life" is not divinatory magic, but an upaya (skillful means) by Venerable Master Hsing Yun to teach Cause and Effect as well as how to transform one's karma of body, speech, and mind. The way Venerable Master Hsing Yun addresses superstition and faith has many parallels with how the Buddha addressed Vedic rituals practiced during that time in ancient India. This paper aims to explore how "Positive Forecasts for Life" is used to guide people from having "faith" rooted in superstition, fear, and personal desire, to a "faith" of compassion, wisdom, and practice of the Bodhisattva path.

Keywords: Humanistic Buddhism, Venerable Master Hsing Yun,
Positive Forecasts for Life, fortune-telling, superstition, faith

1.0 Introduction to Positive Forecasts for Life

In 2012, Fo Guang Shan's Gandha Samudra Culture Company announced the release of pencil sets engraved with Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Dharma Words from *The Hundred Sayings Series* (ch: 往事百語, pinyin: *wang shi bai yu*; lit. meaning: a hundred talks on past events).¹ Sets come in packs of twenty or sixty wooden pencils, each with a red tip and imprinted with different Dharma Words written both in Chinese and English, as well as a bamboo cylindrical pencil holder. Its design is strikingly similar to those of *chien tungs* (ch: 籤筒, pinyin: *qian tong*), the divinatory sticks used in Daoist temples and in Chinese folk religion to request answers from deities (*See Figure 1*). Originally targeted towards students,² the pencils were first presented at the Buddha Memorial Center's Manjusri Pagoda where visitors can draw a pencil for encouragement and advice on their studies.

Figure 1. Left: The Hundred Sayings Series pencil sets. Right: A set of *chien tung*.



The idea of drawing lots and fortune-telling is further nuanced with subsequent releases of "Dharma Words from Venerable Master Hsing Yun – Positive Forecasts for Life" a year later, in 2013. The first edition of "Positive Forecasts for Life" is a pack of 108 cards with Dharma Words narrated by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. The cards were later reprinted with

1. Gandha Samudra website

2. BLTV Broadcast in November 2012: 小朋友愛抽鉛筆籤詩 香海文化有創意



English translations. When considered in the context of cultural events held at the Buddha Memorial Center (i.e. Buddha and Gods, the bi-annual pilgrimage and gathering for deities),³ there are strong evidences supporting a synthesis of folk religion and superstitious thought in Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism.

Daoist influences reappear with the second model of "Positive Forecasts for Life," a red cylindrical container in the form of a *chien tung* containing 108 plastic sticks. However, the differences between "Positive Forecasts for Life" and folk-religion are made readily apparent, as stated on the packaging:

*When we feel lost and uncertain in life, we often try to look for answers or advice. Venerable Master Hsing Yun is often asked to give an advice or words of encouragement; therefore, he has narrated 108 Dharma words based on his personal life experiences. He hopes that these will inspire right mindfulness, and help people realize that "you are your own master," that you must bear the consequences of your own doings, and that the future is in your own hands.*⁴

The concept of Cause and Effect is already made clear in advance. "Positive Forecasts for Life" is not used for divination, but as a tool to guide people to realize of how to change the future and how to change the direction of their lives. Nevertheless, the naming and the design of "Positive Forecasts for Life" are still

3.FGS News Archive: http://www.fgs.org.tw/news/news_content.aspx?news_no=2013051800001

4.Introduction printed on the back of the packaging of "Positive Forecasts for Life."

made to resemble divinatory practices. As a means of upaya to appeal to the public, Venerable Master Hsing Yun utilizes the language of fortune-telling as a skillful teaching to guide people towards a higher truth and a redefined faith.

2.0 Buddhist Teachings Responding to Superstition

Venerable Master Hsing Yun's response to modern beliefs in fortune-telling through Positive Forecasts for Life is innovative, but at the same time, bears striking similarities to the Buddhist response to the superstitious religious thought prevalent in Indian society at the time of the Buddha. Similarities between the modern and the historical responses towards magical thinking provide evidence that the Humanistic Buddhism's definition of "faith" can be traced back to the Buddha's time, with its origins in the Buddha's teachings.

2.1 The Buddha's Response to Sacrificial Rites in Ancient India

Since ancient times, superstitious beliefs and divinatory practices have played a large role in influencing and shaping religious beliefs throughout the history of human civilization.⁵ Superstitious practices were common in ancient India during the time of the Buddha. As an integral part of Brahmanical Vedic religion, *yajnas* (sacrificial rites) involving the slaughtering of animals as an offering to the gods were often performed in order to get what one desires such as good fortune coming

5. Vyse, Stuart A. *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. Print.



in the form of cattle, health, longevity, and family heirs.⁶ It is believed that the goal of ensuring happiness and livelihood can be achieved through rituals of magic.

In the context of ancient Indian belief, Buddhism is considered to be the heterodox religion of its time as it refutes the mainstream Brahmanical religious practices.⁷ It is widely accepted that the Buddha was not a proponent of Vedic practices, particularly regarding animal slaughter.

In the recitation of the Bodhisattva precepts by the Buddha in the *Brahma Net Sutra*, there are two secondary precepts warning against fortune-telling:

*29. On Improper Livelihoods: [...] Neither may he act as a fortune-teller predicting the gender of children, reading dreams and the like. Nor shall he practice sorcery, work as a trainer of falcons or hunting dogs, nor make a living concocting hundreds and thousands of poisons from deadly snakes, insects, or from gold and silver. Such occupations lack mercy, compassion, and filial piety [toward sentient beings]. Therefore, if a Bodhisattva intentionally engages in these occupations, he commits a secondary offense. [...]*⁸

33. On Watching Improper Activities: [...] Furthermore, he should not practice fortune-telling or divination nor should he be an accomplice to thieves and bandits. He must not participate in any of these activities. If

6."Vedic Religion (Indian Religion): Ritual." Encyclopedia Britannica. Web. 27 Apr. 2014.

7.Krishan, Y. "To What Extent Buddhism Repudiated Vedic Religion?" East and West 43.1/4 (1993): 237-40. JSTOR. Web. 27 Apr. 2014.

8.No. 29 of the 48 secondary precepts in the Brahma Net Sutra.

*instead, he intentionally does so, he commits a secondary offense.*⁹

In the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, the Buddha again explains to disciples which are holy actions and which are considered wrong livelihood, which includes fortune-telling:

*Throughout his life, he does not practise the likes of fortune-telling by looking at a person's hands, feet, face, or eyes; nor does he use such things as the "sokya" [used in fortune-telling], divining sticks, tooth picks, bowls, or carcasses; nor does he look up at the sky and the constellations, except when checking drowsiness.*¹⁰

The Buddha gives a comprehensive list in the *Kevaddha Sutra* in the *Dirgha Agama* on what constitutes wrong livelihood:

*reading marks on the limbs [e.g., palmistry];
reading omens and signs;
interpreting celestial events [falling stars, comets];
interpreting dreams;
reading marks on the body [e.g., phrenology];
reading marks on cloth gnawed by mice;
offering fire oblations, oblations from a ladle, oblations of husks, rice powder, rice grains, ghee, and oil;*

9.No. 33 of the 48 secondary precepts in the Brahma Net Sutra.

10.Chapter 19 of the Yamamoto's translation of the Mahaparinirvana Sutra: On Holy Actions (a).



offering oblations from the mouth;
offering blood-sacrifices;
making predictions based on the fingertips;
geomancy;
laying demons in a cemetery;
placing spells on spirits;
reciting house-protection charms;
snake charming, poison-lore, scorpion-lore, rat-lore, bird-lore, crow-
lore;
fortune-telling based on visions;
giving protective charms;
interpreting the calls of birds and animals.¹¹

Furthermore, the Buddha also goes into detail on how Brahmins forecast the future and how these low arts should be abstained from. Examples of forecasts the Buddha rejects are listed in the sutra:

the rulers will march forth;
the rulers will march forth and return;
our rulers will attack, and their rulers will retreat;
their rulers will attack, and our rulers will retreat;
there will be triumph for our rulers and defeat for their rulers;
there will be triumph for their rulers and defeat for our rulers;
thus there will be triumph, thus there will be defeat —

11. The Great Section of Virtue in the Kevatta Sutra.

*there will be a lunar eclipse;
there will be a solar eclipse;
there will be an occultation of an asterism;
the sun and moon will go their normal courses;
the sun and moon will go astray;
the asterisms will go their normal courses;
the asterisms will go astray;
there will be a meteor shower;
there will be a darkening of the sky;
there will be an earthquake;
there will be thunder coming from a clear sky;
there will be a rising, a setting, a darkening, a brightening of the sun,
moon, and asterisms;
such will be the result of the lunar eclipse... the rising, setting, darkening,
brightening of the sun, moon, and asterisms —
there will be abundant rain; there will be a drought;
there will be plenty; there will be famine;
there will be rest and security; there will be danger;
there will be disease; there will be freedom from disease;
or they earn their living by counting, accounting, calculation, composing
poetry, or teaching hedonistic arts and doctrines —
calculating auspicious dates for marriages, betrothals, divorces; for
collecting debts or making investments and loans; for being attractive*



or unattractive; curing women who have undergone miscarriages or abortions;

reciting spells to bind a man's tongue, to paralyze his jaws, to make him lose control over his hands, or to bring on deafness;

getting oracular answers to questions addressed to a mirror, to a young girl, or to a spirit medium;

worshipping the sun, worshipping the Great Brahma, bringing forth flames from the mouth, invoking the goddess of luck —¹²

However, despite the Buddha's repudiation of fortune-telling, the Buddha did tolerate superstitious practices to some extent, even encouraging the continuation of such practices. Though the Buddha chastised magical and divinatory practices by his monastic disciples, he allowed and even encouraged the continuation of such practices by the laity on certain instances.¹³

For example, the *Dummedha Jataka* (no. 50) recounts how in the Buddha, in his previous life as Prince Brahmadata, witnessed the mass sacrifice of countless animals and vowed to end such harm through a plan that wouldn't harm a single living being. When the Bodhisattva passed by a group of people worshipping a tree fairy to grant them children and wealth, the Bodhisattva joined them and even made repeated offerings of perfumes and flowers on many subsequent occasions.

12. See footnote 11.

13. Krishan, Y. "To What Extent Buddhism Repudiated Vedic Religion?" *East and West* 43.1/4 (1993): 237-40. JSTOR. Web. 27 Apr. 2014.

Later, upon kingship, the Bodhisattva announced that he had vowed to make a mass sacrifice of evil-doers to the tree fairy should he become king. As a result, everyone in the kingdom stopped their wrongdoings in order to avoid being killed. The Bodhisattva stopped the practice of ritual sacrifice with what looks like the worshipping of a deity or god. Furthermore, the Bodhisattva used the language of sacrifice in order to change the behavior of the townspeople.¹⁴

In another instance found within the *Kutadanta Sutra* of the *Dirgha Agama*, the Buddha explains to Brahman Kutadanta about the meaning of true sacrifice. The sacrifice the Buddha teaches is not carried out with the 700 of each type of animals already prepared by Kutadanta, but carried out with ghee, oil, butter, curds, honey, and molasses. It does not involve killing of animals, nor does it involve harming the environment, or using slaves or servants to carry out tasks. 'Sacrifice', in this case, is performed with perfect willingness; those who wanted to make the offering can make their offerings without affecting others who did not wish to do something. Following the sacrifices made, Kutadanta asks the Buddha whether there are any more fruitful and profitable sacrifices than this. The Buddha does not condemn his notion of "sacrifice," but rather, explains the Dharma to Kutadanta using this term that is already familiar to him, saying that making offerings to the Sangha, taking refuge in the Triple Gem, and taking the Five Precepts are more "profitable sacrifices." As someone who is embedded in the tradition of superstition and sacrificial rites, Kutadanta only cares about profit for himself, but the Buddha

14. Chalmers, Robert. "Dummedha Jataka (no. 50)." *The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births: Volume 1*. Cambridge: n.p., 1895. N. pag. Print.



does not outright object him.¹⁵

This particular instance exemplifies how the Buddha uses *upaya*, framing the way to right livelihood and enlightenment through the language that Kutadanta already accepts and through a tradition already practiced. The *Kutadanta Sutta* is an example of how Buddha does not refute a practice unless it harms others, but uses it as the basis of a teaching specifically suited to each person's needs. What appears to be superstitious practice and the worship of deities is not actually superstition, but the Dharma in disguise.

2.2 "Positive Forecasts": A Response to Current Fortune-telling Practices

Similarly, Venerable Master Hsing Yun does not refute folk-beliefs as they are already an integral part of the local cultural customs. Instead, Venerable Master Hsing Yun supports and transforms the custom so that it becomes a practice of the Bodhisattva path while still maintaining its acceptability as a continuation of local tradition, such as the invitation of Daoist deities and gods to a bi-annual pilgrimage at Buddha Memorial Center. Like in the *Kutadanta Sutra*, "Positive Forecasts for Life" is a method of *upaya* that uses the language of fortune-telling to teach the Dharma. Venerable Master Hsing Yun teaches people of a more profitable method of fortune-telling and a better method to get a desirable outcome in the future. "Positive Forecasts for Life" teaches Cause and Effect and the practice of the Bodhisattva path as the "highest form of forecast" when it is actually not a form of "forecasting."

15."Kutadanta Sutta: On True Sacrifice." Wh120 — Kutadanta Sutta. Web. 19 May 2014.

3.0 Superstition as a Misunderstanding of Cause and Effect

In order to understand how "Positive Forecasts for Life" differs from superstition and divinatory magic as well as how it guides people away from so-called "superstition" to practicing the Bodhisattva Path, a definition of what constitutes superstition and magic must occur. While rituals may vary between cultures and religion, these practices, from the ancient sacrificial rites to modern divinatory practices of fortune-telling and magic, all arise from a common origin— a mind rooted in desire and fear.¹⁶

3.1 Attribution Theory of Religion: The Need to Answer "Why?"

Religion is largely based upon attribution, making causal explanations of ourselves, others, and the world around us.¹⁷ Sometimes these explanations are logical and in other instances, unfounded in reason. In prehistoric times, human civilization did not have a full understanding of the world and feared nature. As a result, people worshipped natural phenomenon, a practice that gradually transformed into a religion of the divine.¹⁸ When faced with natural forces such as flood, wind, rain, and fire beyond human control and the comprehension of the

16. Vyse, Stuart A. *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. Print.

17. Proudfoot, Wayne, and Phillip Shaver. "Attribution Theory and the Psychology of Religion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 14.4 (1975): 317. Print.

18. Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. *Looking Ahead: A Guide for Young Buddhists*. Hacienda Heights, CA: BLP, 2006. Print.



time, people were fearful and believed it to be caused by a divine force. Hence, people practiced all sorts of ritual sacrifices in an attempt for forgiveness and to please the divine for prosperity and to prevent misfortunes.

In retrospect, modern science may condemn such superstitious belief and magic as irrational, merely coincidental, and scientifically unproven, but it is undeniable that superstitious belief has played and *still* plays a large role in the development of human civilization, particularly in religious thought. Belief in magical phenomena is universal across cultures, visible in almost all traditional folk beliefs, within all cultural histories, and still prevalent in contemporary thought. Almost anything can be used as a tool of prophecy. Records show that the practice of divination through using playing cards was already present in Europe as early as the 16th century. Such practices of tarot are still widespread today, even spawning internet versions that claim to be able to see the future. Astrology, which dates back to Ancient Mesopotamia, is still practiced today, with horoscopes being an essential part of daily newspapers and on the internet, pervading the most important aspects of life.¹⁹

On the most basic level, superstition and all religions offer explanations for the human condition and answers to difficult questions that begin with "Why?". From explaining the creation of the world, to explaining why things are the way they are, as well as explaining birth and death, religions offer people way to make sense and

19.Koch, Ulla Susanne. *Mesopotamian Astrology: An Introduction to Babylonian and Assyrian Celestial Divination*. Copenhagen: Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies, 1995. Print.

meaning out of the world for otherwise seemingly random events.²⁰ In addition, most religions share the common characteristic to fulfilling the human need for predictability and control future outcomes. Many times, the desired result is gained through an extrinsic form of control: prayer, rituals, or conformity; or an intrinsic form of control: everything will turn out well just through mere faith and belief. On the other hand, the Buddhist teachings also offers an explanation for "Why?", with an emphasis on the truth of Cause and Effect, not seeking outwards or from a divine power, but inwards from within the mind.

3.2 Responding to Uncertainty through Magic

In the first of the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha teaches that there is *dukkha*, which can be translated as "dissatisfaction," "anxiety," or "unease," which is associated with physical and mental suffering. Physical suffering includes birth, old age, illness, and death. Mental suffering includes separation from loved ones, closeness to what one dislikes, not getting one's desires, and the five aggregates. All of these sufferings have the element of uncertainty about the future, impermanence, as well as a sense of powerlessness, which people cope with through superstitious religions and rituals of magic.

Divinatory practices are sought most often during the instances in which one encounters birth, old age, sickness, and death as these are the times impermanence

20. Spilka, Bernard, and Greg Schmidt. "General Attribution Theory for the Psychology of Religion: The Influence of Event-Character on Attributions to God." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22.4 (1983): 326. Print.



can be felt the most strongly. Rituals involving magic occur only when there are elements of uncertainty or danger, as well as emotions of both hope and fear.²¹ Interestingly, under circumstances which are certain, magical practices are not found. To put it simply, the reason people turn to magical practices because of the unknown.

The questions of "Why?" in itself is the element of not knowing something, an ignorance. Even if an event has passed, people still seek to answers to what caused a situation. People ask why they are in their current situations or why something has happened to them, but not to anyone else. It is precisely this lack of understanding of Cause and Effect that causes people to turn to magic. The religion of superstition is the misattribution of causes to effects. The practices seek to explain effects through attributing them to causes, but because of ignorance, the wrong causes are often attributed.

Even though superstitions are disproven through science, why do people still believe and practice them? Superstitions are generally seen as ways to prevent bad luck, but research show that superstitions are not all negative in nature. It can give people a sense of hope, such as wearing a lucky charm or crossing fingers, as well as a sense of control.²² For the same reasons, people resort to fortune-telling and magic. Studies have shown that superstition can help people perform better due to

21.Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Magic, Science and Religion: And Other Essays*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954. Print.

22.Damisch, L., B. Stoberock, and T. Mussweiler. "Keep Your Fingers Crossed!: How Superstition Improves Performance." *Psychological Science* 21.7 (2010): 1014-020. Print.

the placebo effect, a reason for people to continue magical practices.

3.3 "Faith" Based on Desire

Most people have faith in religion and magic because it seems to offer something in return, albeit counter to the law of Cause and Effect. It is common to see people praying to gods, deities, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas for things such as peace, prosperity, wealth, honor, and longevity for oneself, family, and friends. While the Buddha is not a deity or a god, people have the tendency to worship the Buddha for something in return. This type of faith originates out of "desire" and possessiveness. Venerable Master Hsing Yun calls this type of religious practices as a faith characterized by *bai fo* (拜佛; bowing to the Buddha) and *qiu fo* (求佛; making requests to the Buddha).²³

However, according to the Second Noble Truth taught by the Buddha, it is because of one's greed, aversion, and ignorance that one experiences the sufferings in the First Noble Truth. Bowing to deities and making requests to the divine cannot truly promote the wellbeing of one's life because it does not fully understand Cause and Effect. When people turn to magic and religion out of desire, it is already creating the cause of suffering.

It is only by understanding Cause and Effect and eradicating greed, aversion,

23. Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. "Fojiao dui minjian xinyang de kan fa" 佛教對「民間信仰」的看法 [Buddhist View on Folk Beliefs]. *Pu men xue bao* 普門學報 [Universal Gate Buddhist Journal] 24 (Jan. 2004): 263-298. Print.



and ignorance, can suffering be ceased. "Positive Forecasts for Life" seeks to correctly attribute effects to causes according to the Buddha's teaching of Cause and Effect. It is a guide to transform people's faiths, from one based on desire for oneself to a faith based on practice and the benefit of others. The Dharma Words of Venerable Master Hsing Yun lead people away from suffering through an understanding of Cause and Effect as taught by the Buddha and guides people towards the practice of the Bodhisattva path.

4.0 Redefining Faith from Belief to Practice

4.1 Locus of Control: Comparing Fortune-Telling and "Positive Forecasts"

The term *bu shi* (卜事) literally means a divine estimate of situations and affairs. And yet, Venerable Master Hsing Yun clearly states that the future is in our own hands and yet the cards are supposed "forecasts" of our future. From the perspective of design and usage, fortune-telling sticks and "Positive Forecasts for Life" appear to be similar, but an analysis of its contents reveals dissimilarities in the way the future is predicted.

In traditional fortune-telling, the future is often portrayed as something to be fearful about. Moreover, the person does not have control over the way the future plays out. Ironically, people turn to fortune-telling due to an unease over the future, only to be answered with continued fear and unease. One particular student in Fo Guang Shan's Women's Buddhist College who had sought advice from a fortune-teller before she had learned Buddhism recounts:

I didn't know what to do, what I should study, whether I should follow what my mother wanted for me or do something else. So I went to a fortune-teller, but he didn't tell me anything and I left still not knowing what to do with my future.²⁴

People resort to magic and divinity because they would like advice on what to do and have a sense of control over their "destiny," but the answers they receive are unable to fully give them a complete sense of reassurance and peace of mind.

Table 1 below is a selected comparison between the fortunes of a typical set of traditional fortune-telling sticks and those of "Positive Forecasts for Life." The forecasts for traditional fortune-telling sticks include both positive and negative predictions. Forecasts can be categorized as positive generally deal with wealth, romance, or relationships. However, most predictions tend to be more negative than positive, and even in seemingly positive situations, such as when relationships are going smoothly, the predictions can arouse suspicion, encouraging a mistrust of others. However, the phrases in "Positive Forecasts for Life" are all positive in some aspect, even when facing a negative situation. The positivity is not materialistic, but from one's intrinsic nature, such as finding courage and compassion within oneself.

Table 1. A comparison of fortune-telling sticks and "Positive Forecasts for Life"

24. Student account recorded during a group study discussion within the Buddhist College.



Traditional Fortune-Telling Sticks ²⁵	“Positive Forecasts for Life”
<p>1. Not liked at heart by many friends , You never ought to roam; But stick to close relations , Home is where your work is best.</p> <p>5. The fates predict your best success Will come through life of trade; But work alone, no partner take , Or you'll lose what you have made.</p> <p>8. A dream you'll have may be sad , Hard luck it would indicate; Be cautious about this warning sign , It will come right in the end.</p> <p>47. The fates all seem to indicate You'll live a ripe old age; And great honor will be conferred In music or on the stage.</p> <p>56. Some friends you thought were true , Your actions criticize; And try to make you enemies , But your loved ones are too wise.</p>	<p>1. Opportunity seldom knocks twice; seize the moment.</p> <p>8. All things are created by causes and conditions; make it a point to give others causes and conditions.</p> <p>48. To love means to cherish, to be compassionate, to be of service, to be tolerant, and to be wise.</p> <p>57. Be brave enough to face your challenges. Nothing is difficult if you are determined.</p> <p>89. Any animosity that exists in this world can be resolved with joy and smiles.</p> <p>97. Don' t be nervous. Relax. There is no problem that cannot be resolved.</p>

25.Hsing Yun,Venerable Master 星雲大師. "Fojiao dui zongjiao zhi jian de kan fa" 佛教對「宗教之間」的看法 [Buddhist Perspective on Religion]. Pu men xue bao 普門學報 [Universal Gate Buddhist Journal] 19 (Nov. 2004): 191-230. Print.

Fortunes no. 1 and 56 deal with the topic of friendship with skepticism, suggesting the possibility of an enemy in disguise, and does not offer solutions to remedy the situation. Such beliefs sabotage confidence in one another and have no benefits in a relationship. Hence, the person is still left powerless and not knowing what to do. On the other hand, "Positive Forecasts for Life" offers ways to act in the present in order to make the future better. The locus of control in "Positive Forecasts for Life" is intrinsic where as the locus of control in fortune-telling is extrinsic. On the same subject of friendship, in Dharma Word no. 48, Venerable Master Hsing Yun explains how to love one's friends by being selfless and compassionate, requiring action on one's behalf. Friendship is deepened through altruism instead of being destroyed out of self-centeredness, having a sense of control within interpersonal relationships. Whenever there is a perceived intrinsic locus of control, there is power over the transformation of a situation as well as one's future instead of passivity.

4.2 Faith Defined by Practice

In the Third and Fourth Noble Truths, the Buddha teaches that there is a way to liberation. The effect of cessation of suffering results from the cause of practicing the Eightfold Noble Path. Likewise, Venerable Master Hsing Yun advocates a faith based on *xing fo* (行佛; practicing the Buddha's teachings).²⁶ In line with the Four Noble Truths, the essence of Humanistic Buddhism is the cessation of suffering

26. Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. "Fojiao dui zongjiao zhi jian de kan fa" 佛教對「宗教之間」的看法 [Buddhist Perspective on Religion]. *Pu men xue bao* 普門學報 [Universal Gate Buddhist Journal] 19 (Nov. 2004): 191-230. Print.



through a "faith" based on practice. Practice shapes behavior, purifying our karma, ultimately changing our future.

According to the Buddha's teachings, all phenomena in this world arise and cease due to dependant origination and the Law of Cause and Effect. Everything that occurs in our daily lives is the result of the karma of past behavior. Therefore, Venerable Master Hsing Yun advocates that "we are own god."²⁷ As the power is within one's hands, all one's behaviors in daily life determine the way the future is shaped. But, only having controls over the directions of life is not enough to change the future. Action is also necessary. A simile of driving a car can elucidate why it is essential to practice in daily life. Without the practice, it is like attempting to reach a destination through merely sitting at the driver's seat of a car. Practice is constant action; it is igniting the engine and consistently pushing the gas pedal in order to command the car forward. Practice and responsibility for one's actions is the catalyst for change.

5.0 "Positive Forecasts" and the Practice of the Six Paramitas

Practice is an integral part of the Bodhisattva path. In the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha teaches the six paramitas as the training of Bodhisattvas seeking enlightenment: *dana* (giving charity), *sila* (upholding precepts), *ksanti* (patience), *virya* (diligence), *dhyana* (meditative concentration), and *prajna* (wisdom). By

27.Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. *Of Benefit to Oneself and Others: a critique of the six perfections*. Hacienda Heights, CA: BLP, 2002. Print.

practicing the six paramitas, one can transcend suffering and benefit both oneself and others. An analysis of the content in "Positive Forecasts for Life" show that the phrases in Venerable Master's Dharma Words are also guides to practicing the six paramitas, essential to a Bodhisattva's practice.

5.1 Giving: Creating Good Affinities

According to the *Lotus Sutra*, giving is the first step for liberation as a skillful means to teach the Dharma.²⁸ "Positive Forecasts for Life" is also a form of giving as it offers people the basics of what they are seeking for and eventually leads to a greater reward. In order to fulfill these desires that people are seeking, people must first learn to give to others, a practice which the Dharma Words in "Positive Forecasts for Life" guides. This giving is the first step in the process of reaping an even greater reward of practicing the Dharma.

The Buddhist scriptures give many examples of the merits and fruits from giving. The *Mahaparamita Sastra (Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom)* lists the results of various types of giving, such as the giving of food and drink resulting in having strength and a dignified appearance.²⁹ Therefore, by encouraging

28. Lotus Sutra Chapter 2 Expedient Means. "I know the nature and desires of living beings and through expedient means I preach these doctrines, causing all living beings to attain joy and gladness."

29. Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra Chapter 19. CBETA 電子大藏經系列 V 1.0, 1999/12/1. 大智度論釋初品中檀相義第十九:「布施是得三十二相因緣。所以者何。施時與心堅固。得足下安立相。布施時。五事圍繞受者。是眷屬業因緣故。得足下輪相。大勇猛力施故。得足跟廣平相。施攝人故。得手足縵網相。美味飲食施故。得手足柔軟七處滿相。」



giving in "Positive Forecasts for Life," Venerable Master Hsing Yun helps people find the things they seek through the understanding the causes of the effects desired. Therefore, through the perspective of Cause and Effect, "Positive Forecasts for Life" is a "positive forecast" because doing wholesome deeds in the present reaps positive results in the future.

41. Gain only comes after giving. You must sow before you reap.

79. Do not be too stingy. The willingness to develop affinities will broaden your connections.

80. Giving is not always done with money. A smile, words of compliment, or acts of service are also forms of giving.³⁰

Dharma Words no. 41 and 79 frames giving in the context of one's desire. However, Venerable Master Hsing Yun explains:

Most people believe in religion out of 'desire,' always asking the bodhisattvas or the gods for peace, prosperity, a harmonious family, wealth, longevity. This type of faith based on desire is unable to benefit one's spirit and character. Our faiths should be based on 'giving' such as shouldering responsibilities, sacrifice, and helping others. As a practitioners of Humanistic Buddhism, we should have the character of benefiting others through compassion, loving-kindness, joyfulness, and

30. Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. *Dharma Words from Venerable Master Hsing Yun - Positive Forecasts for Life*. N.p.: Gandha Samudra, 2013. Print.

*equanimity.*³¹

In the *Sutra on the Perfection of Giving (Danaparamita Sutra)*, the Buddha explains that not giving causes suffering. People experience wealth today as the result of giving in the past. Of course, giving has to be done with the right intentions in mind, as according to the *Sutra of Cause and Effect*.³² The highest form of giving is where one gives without a sense of self, but realizing this has to start from giving, even when there is sense of self, and attained through cultivating the perfection of generosity.³³

5.2 Upholding Precepts: Purifying the Karmas

Precepts are the foundation of morality for purifying one's body, speech, and mind through avoiding unwholesome actions and practicing all that is wholesome. The keeping of precepts benefits both self and others. Since others are not harmed by one's behavior, sentient beings have no reason to fear the person, thus creating

31.Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. “Renjian Fojiao Xilie: Renjian yu shijian – Renjian fojiao de sixiang” 人間佛教系列·人間與實踐·人間佛教的思想 [The Special Characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism].

32.Sutra of Cause and Effect. CBETA 電子大藏經系列. 過去現在因果經:「汝若決定不與我花,當從汝願。我好布施,不逆人意,若使有來從我乞求頭目髓腦,及與妻子,汝莫生闕,壞吾施心。」

33.Mahaparinivana Sutra Chapter 21: On Pure Actions. “No discrimination is made as to the cause or the result thereof, or to worrying about what is right [worthy] or not right about the recipient, or whether he is rich or not rich. Also, the Bodhisattva does not trouble to look into any difference as to whether the recipient is a person who gives or one who receives, what the thing is that is given, or ceasing, or the recompense for what is given. The only thing that is done is that giving is performed without cessation.”



good affinities. According to the Buddha's teachings in the Dirga Agama, the merits to upholding precepts include getting one's wishes, the increasing of wealth, being loved and revered by all, good reputation, and rebirth in heaven after death.³⁴ Furthermore, the Avatamsaka Sutra teaches that upholding the precepts is "the unsurpassable basis for bodhi"³⁵ as it is precepts are the foundation for concentration and wisdom.

20. A happy outcome for all is best. Do not humiliate others; give them our blessings.

25. Accept that "I am a Buddha." As a Buddha, how can I possibly have hatred, jealousy, arrogance, or speak foul language?

30. Be a good person, do no evil, and do good deeds.

42. We are all creating history; therefore we must establish ourselves in merit, in virtue, and in speech.³⁶

Interestingly, Venerable Master Hsing takes proactive stance-point in the upholding of precepts. For example, *Dharma Words no. 30* not only says "do no evil" but says "do good deeds." Instead of merely saying that avoid evil deeds,

34. Dirgha Agama (Long Discourses of the Buddha). CBETA 電子大藏經系列. 長阿含：「諸佛常法：毗婆尸菩薩從兜率天降神母胎，專念不亂，其母奉持五戒，梵行清淨，篤信仁愛，諸善成就，安樂無畏，身壞命終，生忉利天，此是常法。」

35. Avatamsaka Sutra Chapter 8. CBETA 電子大藏經系列. 大方廣佛華嚴經賢首菩薩品第八之一：「若持淨戒順正教，諸佛賢聖所讚歎，戒是無上菩提本，應當具足持淨戒。」

36. Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. *Dharma Words from Venerable Master Hsing Yun - Positive Forecasts for Life*. N.p.: Gandha Samudra, 2013. Print.

an action is given, changing the person from passively "not doing" to the active "doing." In divinatory magic and fortune-telling, people are always passively accepting the future outcome, and even though a person may pray to the gods and the deities for one's desires, actively changing one's future is often lacking. It is this passivity and sense of powerlessness that causes fear and uncertainty in people. When people believe that they have no control over a situation, placing the locus of control externally, they no longer assume responsibility for their actions, going against the law of Cause and Effect.

"Positive Forecasts for Life" places control over one's future in the person's hands because it is based on Cause and Effect, where actions taken today will be results reaped in the future. The person has to take full responsibility for one's body, speech, and mind, not only by refraining from unwholesome actions, but by actively striving towards a goal of benefiting others, which becomes a motivational power driving one forward to a better future. Hence, Venerable Master Hsing Yun says, "the upholding of precepts is not a restriction, but freedom," both for oneself and for others.

5.3 Patience: From Passive to Active

The *Sutra of the Teachings Bequeathed by the Buddha* describes patience as a virtue surpassing that of the upholding of precepts and describes those who practice patience as "great" and someone with "strength".³⁷ On the other hand, anger as a

37." One who is able to practice patience can be called a great person who has strength; If you are unable to happily and patiently undergo the poison of malicious abuse, as if



raging fire in the mind that destroys merit and virtue.³⁸ On the surface, patience seems to be passive—"not doing"—not complaining or reacting with negativity towards difficult circumstances. However, it is a source of courage and strength to continue forwards. Venerable Master Hsing Yun describes patience as "the strength to accept, bear, take charge, transform, handle, and liberate."³⁹The *Brahma Net Sutra* describes bodhisattvas as not angered by others, but always compassionate towards others and towards the situation.⁴⁰ The patience of a Bodhisattva is not passively accepting, but a stepping stone to transform a situation. Likewise, the Dharma Words in "Positive Forecasts for Life" teaches how to transform a would-be negative situation into a positive one.

5. Never compare, never fuss, never fear adversity, and never fear suffering.

22. Anger does not solve problems; working hard to resolve a situation does.

105. Adversity or hardship, once confronted and resolved, will turn into life's betterment and blessings.⁴¹

drinking sweet dew, you cannot be called a wise person who has entered the Way." The Sutra of Bequeathed Teachings by the Buddha.

38." The harm from anger ruins all good dharmas and destroys one's good reputation."

The Sutra of Bequeathed Teachings by the Buddha.

39.Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. Of Benefit to Oneself and Others: a critique of the six perfections. Hacienda Heights, CA: BLP, 2002. Print

40.Ninth major precept on anger and resentment.

41.Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. Dharma Words from Venerable Master Hsing Yun - Positive Forecasts for Life. N.p.: Gandha Samudra, 2013. Print.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Dharma Words explains that anger does not solve a situation. By resolving anger, merit is retained, but the practice of a bodhisattva cannot just stop at not being complacent and doing nothing. Facing the situation head on and hard work is required for transformation. This type of patience transcends negativity and the person actively takes charge of their own future.

5.4 Diligence: Continuously Cultivating Oneself

Even in our daily lives, people have different mindsets regarding work. Some work happily while others view it as a type of suffering. "Positive Forecasts for Life" describes keeping busy as positive and joyful:

3. Be perfectly willing in all your endeavors; never forget your initial resolve, and take responsibility for your actions.

6. Regard a busy life as a healthy one. Keep busy with joy, and with purpose.

*53. Start with today, and start with yourself. Do not procrastinate and do not rely on others.*⁴²

When work becomes a source of joy and meaning, people are more likely to work without complaint and without asking for anything in return. The paramita of diligence, however, is not only work in the worldly sense, but work on one's character. The *Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra (Great Treatise on the Perfection of*

42. See Footnote 27.



Wisdom) describes diligence as the basis of cultivation because it is the constant improvement of oneself.⁴³ As it is the Law of Cause and Effect, all actions taken will lead to an effect. No action leads to no effect. Hence, success for a positive future requires constant positive action. Diligence combats laziness, the passivity that is one of the causes of suffering, and is integral to the actualizing enlightenment. As Venerable Master Hsing Yun puts it, "diligence on the job leads to success, diligently practicing the Dharma means merit, diligence in this life means certain success in the next."⁴⁴ The type of diligence practiced leads to the corresponding result. The Dharma Words in "Positive Forecasts for Life" encourage positive diligence, which leads to a positive future.

5.5 Meditation: Liberation from the Desire and Hatred

The Chan School teaches that Chan meditation is not only practiced on the sitting cushion, but in all aspects of daily life. While never using the word Chan or meditation, as the majority of the audience for "Positive Forecasts for Life" is probably less knowledgeable about the subject, Venerable Master Hsing Yun clearly incorporates the essence of Chan meditation in his advice.

62. Do not be moved by money, do not be moved by emotions, and do not be moved by circumstances.

43. Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra Chapter 16. CBETA 電子大藏經系列 V 1.0, 1999/12/1: 大智度論釋初品中毘梨耶波羅蜜義第二十六: 「一切諸善法乃至阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。皆從精進不放逸生。復次精進能動發先世福德。」

44. Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. *Of Benefit to Oneself and Others: a critique of the six perfections*. Hacienda Heights, CA: BLP, 2002. Print

70. Laugh when it is time to laugh, speak when it is time to speak, act when it is time to act; seize the moment.

87. Do not take the stresses generated by gossip to heart, for it will taint your nature.⁴⁵

Meditation is being unmoved by external circumstances, preventing greed and anger, the causes of suffering, to overtake the mind. Through meditation, the situation can be seen clearly without being clouded by emotions. Practicing meditation is not being stoic, but being natural according to the causes and conditions. Venerable Master Hsing Yun advises to laugh when it is time to laugh, instead of being aloof. In order to practice the Bodhisattva path, one must engage others and act according to circumstances. This is the true understanding of the Law of Cause and Effect as well as Cause and Condition.

5.6 Prajna Wisdom: Understanding Cause and Effect

The last of the six paramitas is prajna wisdom, to be able to see the world as it actually is, to be able to see Cause and Effect. By having prajna wisdom, one eliminates greed, hatred, and ignorance, thus eradicating the cause of one's suffering. "Positive Forecasts for Life" gives people insight on the Truths that the Buddha taught, leading them in the direction of understanding.

45. You must believe in cause and effect, for the rule of cause, condition,

45. Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. Dharma Words from Venerable Master Hsing Yun - Positive Forecasts for Life. N.p.: Gandha Samudra, 2013. Print.



and effect is the Truth of the universe.

71. Follow conditions, follow your role, follow your heart, and follow your community. Are you able to follow and oblige all sentient beings?

103. Do not abide in form, sound, smell, taste, touch or dharma. Abide in kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity.

Because one understands Cause and Effect, actions are taken appropriately, hence reaping a positive result. Prajna wisdom is true understanding, being able to answer the questions of "Why?" that propelled people to when turn to superstitious faith, divinity, and religion in the first place. By seeing reality, one no longer lives in fear and does not need to rely on an external force for protection. Hence, the locus of control is entirely in one's hands.

5.7 The Highest Level of Faith

As Venerable Master Hsing Yun puts it:

Prajna is everyone's intrinsic Buddha-nature. The goal of learning Buddhism is build upon our Buddha-nature. Faith in Buddhism begins with seeking from the Buddha, believing in the Buddha, and prostrating to the Buddha, and advances to learning from the Buddha, practicing the teachings of the Buddha, and becoming a Buddha. Humanistic Buddhism can only be actualized through the practicing of the Buddha's teachings. The highest level of faith is when one becomes the Buddha.⁴⁶

46.Hsing Yun, Venerable Master 星雲大師. "Fojiao dui minjian xinyang de kan fa" 佛

Beginners on the path are originally drawn to "Positive Forecasts for Life" because it seems to offer some type of benefit. However, the benefiting of oneself cannot occur without benefiting others, and the benefiting of others is actually benefiting oneself. The six paramitas appear to be benefiting others, but its results also benefit oneself. And, as the practice of the six paramitas eventually leads to Buddhahood, "Positive Forecasts for Life" provides the basis to reach the highest level of faith.

The parable of the burning house in chapter three of the *Lotus Sutra* tells of a wealthy merchant who rescues his children in the burning house who are absorbed in playing by promising three gifts of different vehicles outside: a goat cart, a deer cart, and an ox cart. The children run outside only to discover that there is only one cart pulled by a white ox, better than the three mentioned before. The three carts promised represent the different rewards promised through following the Buddhist teachings and practices while the latter white ox cart is true liberation, better than the promised rewards.⁴⁷ Likewise, "Positive Forecasts for Life" as a 'fortune-telling tool' promises to fulfill people's mundane desires of wealth, prosperity, and fortune, but the path of liberation it offers is far greater than the apparent rewards.

教對「民間信仰」的看法 [Buddhist View on Folk Beliefs]. Pu men xue bao 普門學報 [Universal Gate Buddhist Journal] 24 (Jan. 2004): 263-298. Print.

47. Lotus Sutra Chapter 3: Simile and Parable.



6.0 Conclusion

Though "Positive Forecasts for Life" uses the name of forecasting and is designed to resemble divinatory sticks and playing cards, it is actually not forecasting in the sense of fortune-telling. Like how the Buddha uses the language and customs already familiar in ancient India to teach the Dharma, Venerable Master Hsing Yun utilizes the already popular and familiar customs of fortune-telling in the form of "Positive Forecasts for Life." Its surface design packages the Dharma in a way that can be easily accessed and understood by the local culture.

It is also evidently clear that the contents of "Positive Forecasts for Life" contain the essence of the Buddha's teachings in Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Dharma Words. It is called "Positive Forecasts for Life" because it follows the law of Cause and Effect, resulting in positive outcomes if wholesome actions are taken today. Furthermore, its name also signifies that all of these actions are to be practiced in daily life. Benefiting oneself through purifying the body, speech, and mind, and benefiting others through the six paramitas, the Dharma Words in "Positive Forecasts for Life" transforms "faith" based on desire and ignorance to one of practice and understanding, the essence of Humanistic Buddhism.

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