



Perfectly Willing

Buddhism in Every Step (H10)

Venerable Master Hsing Yun

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Perfectly Willing

I respect Mancheng,¹ my Dharma brother, for his endurance, his non-contention, his big-hearted speech, and his open mind, and hence, I have kept his saying firmly in mind: “Perfectly willing.”

Master Zhikai had two disciples, Mancheng and myself. Prior to studying with Master Zhikai, Mancheng had followed a different master. This caused him often to remark that he was only half a disciple to Master Zhikai. Mancheng had experienced a harder time in his youth than I had. Honest and not too smart, he was often bullied and wronged. Like a daughter-in-law in old China, he had to do extra work

1 All Chinese names in this text are Romanized by the Pinyin system except for a few that are established in Wade-Giles.

and always took extra blame. Sometimes, seeing that he had taken too many reproaches, I would go and try to console him. Somehow, he would always say calmly, “That’s all right. I’m perfectly willing to do what I do.”

Perfectly Willing to Be a Monk

During the ten years of my Buddhist study and discipline, I was also subjected to many ruthless reproaches and unreasonable requests. Rigid and closed, Buddhist monastic training not only kept us sequestered from the outside world but also restricted what we could see and hear. Looking around and talking freely were forbidden. For a young and curious boy, there could be no greater test than this, not to mention the lack of basic necessities and arduousness of labor that were beyond imagination. I lived through these hardships with a peaceful mind, not taking the difficulties as suffering. The motto that supported me was as Mancheng used to say: “I’m perfectly willing.” I am perfectly willing to become a Buddhist monk, perfectly willing to study, perfectly willing to be an ascetic, and perfectly willing to accept all blame and wrong. For this reason, I lived those ten years in serenity. The



tenacity and perseverance cultivated during that period were strong assets in my efforts to propagate Buddhism years later.

At twenty-one, I left the monastery to be a principal in a rural primary school. Although I was totally inexperienced in educational administration, I worked diligently with an open-minded, persistent, humble attitude and did quite well at my first position. Soon thereafter, I was twenty-two and in charge of Huazang Temple in Nanjing. The impossible

situation the country was suffering from² made me realize that there was little possibility of Buddhism becoming widely accepted at that time. Still, with the knowledge that I might lose my life, I, along with others, published *Raging Billows*, a monthly publication advocating revolutionary thoughts in the hope of saving our faith. We continuously found ourselves in extremely dangerous situations but were always perfectly willing to sacrifice for our cause. The more we were deterred, the bolder and more determined we became.

When I first arrived in Taiwan, people everywhere were restless and distrustful. All my requests for monastic lodging were denied, and getting basic necessities such as food and shelter became a serious problem. Although *Jinri qingnian* (*Today's Youth*) and *Kanzhan ribao* (*Wartime Daily*) had offered me positions as editor and reporter, I decided after some serious consideration that I would be what a monk should be and not put the incidental before the fundamental. Therefore, I declined both offers, and I spent many nights cold and hungry. So many ridiculed me as obsolete, stagnant, and ignorant in the affairs of

2 The Chinese Civil War began in 1927 and continued until August 1950.

our time. Yet, I was perfectly willing to do what a monk should.

Finally, I was granted lodging in a temple, where I did all kinds of hard labor from early in the morning until late at night. Although I was very busy with many tasks, such as dragging a cart to buy groceries, carrying firewood and water, tending the garden, traveling long distances to collect rent, cleaning the temple, and burying the dead, I was grateful for the shelter and was perfectly willing to reciprocate the temple's kindness with hard labor.

After my daily chores were completed, I wrote articles to propagate Buddhism. The articles called for a reformed practice of Buddhism, speaking against government interference in religion, and suggesting laws be established to assure equal treatment for all religions, and I sent them to various newspapers. I had nothing but enthusiasm for and devotion to Buddhism. Often, I would see other monks coming back from services with loads of contributions while I could not even afford the ink and paper that I needed for writing my articles, but I was never envious of anybody, because my ultimate goal was to spread the Dharma to benefit all sentient beings.

One day as I was writing, a woman who often volunteered at the temple came up to me and said kindly, “You must go and look for work, otherwise you’ll end up starving.” I later found out that whenever I was buried in reading and writing papers, I drew curious looks from people around the temple because, in those days, intellectual writers were not highly regarded. Nonetheless, I insisted that articles and letters were indispensable in advocating and spreading Buddhism. Writing for the Central Broadcasting Station and various journals might have driven me to the brink of starvation, but I was perfectly willing to continue doing so.

Perfectly Willing to Spread the Dharma

To assist Venerable Master Dongchu in editing *Rensheng yuekan* (*Life Monthly*), I paid for paper and postage out of pocket. This continued for more than six years. Likewise, to help publish *Jinri fojiao* (*Buddhism Today*), I often commuted between Taipei and Ilan on an empty stomach and spent countless sleepless nights composing articles. I never took this as suffering. I was determined to be perfectly willing to dedicate everything to Buddhism, including my own life.



In those years when few people were willing to work for Buddhist culture, I was especially grateful to those intellectuals who helped me. To them, I would pay my ultimate respect and offer any service I could render. For those who shared my interest in writing, I was never too tired or too busy to provide instruction, and I was always happy to do so.

Even today, I continue to work with friends publishing Buddhist works. When Larui Cheng wanted to publish the imperial collection of Buddhist sutras, I volunteered to approach Chin Hsiao-yi, curator of the National Palace Museum, for the texts. I helped Yao Jiayan of Literate Publishing distribute his Buddhist titles. I advised and sponsored Zhang Mantao and Zhu Jiangyuan, whom I did not know well, in publishing two series, *Xiandai fojiao xueshu congkan* (*Contemporary Buddhist Texts Compiled in One Hundred Books*) and *Shijie fojiao mingzhu fanyi luncong* (*Translations from World Classics in Buddhism Series*). I raised funds to help them survive financial crises. Much to the chagrin of those who disapproved, I was perfectly willing in my efforts to salvage these two publications, which have since made marked contributions to the advancement of Buddhism.

Over thirty years, while publishing journals like *Awaken the World* and *Universal Gate*, compiling the *Fo Guang Buddhist Canons*, distributing the *Fo Guang Buddhist Dictionary*, and establishing the Buddhist Cultural Center and Fo Guang Shan Publishing House, cultural endeavors at Fo Guang Shan have encountered many financial problems. Yet, these shortages never affected my determination. I saved from food allowances and personal expenses to acquire and collect Buddhist cultural artifacts. To cut shipping costs, I carried heavy Buddhist statues, instruments, and scripts in my luggage. I often was met with curious stares, and a few times, people derided me because they thought I was selling the artifacts instead of taking them to the temples. However, to stay on course, I was perfectly willing to bear all such embarrassment and slandering. As a result, ten libraries were built in Taiwan and abroad. Buddhist museums at Fo Guang Shan, Hsi Lai Temple, and Paris Vihara were completed. For the rapidly increasing Buddhist followers, I was perfectly willing to bear any burden.

Coming a long way from an era of chaos and uncertainty, I saw that the people in Taiwan had yet to be enlightened and Buddhism had yet to flourish

there, and under those circumstances, I became aware of the importance of education even more so. Upon completion of Shoushan Temple, I decided to establish an institute there for the purposes of educating the Buddhist community. Many of my disciples became greatly concerned over our financial ability to cover food and shelter, let alone the whole of the institute, but the urgency of education drove me to decide that, even if I was left penniless and forced to beg like Wuxun,³ for the cause of education, I would be perfectly willing.

Whenever I had saved enough, I would buy furniture and stationery supplies for the institute and hire learned scholars to come and teach. Later, to establish the Eastern Buddhist College, I stayed up all night holding Buddhist services, a practice I normally do not favor. To prepare for the construction of the Chinese Buddhist Research Institute, my disciples and I worked long and hard on food sales to raise funds. I would not hesitate to hire excellent scholars from overseas to come and teach English Buddhist courses at the English Buddhist program of the international academic department. Colleagues in our

3 Wuxun (1838–1896) pioneered free education in rural China and funded his efforts with money made from begging.

accounting department were often disheartened by the lack of funds; I was certainly aware of our restrictions, but I was also perfectly willing. So long as competent human resources in the Buddhist community continued to be strengthened and Buddhism continued to be propagated worldwide, I would always be perfectly willing to sacrifice and contribute.

Training programs for novice monks were even harder to run. It took great efforts to raise boys who were often only ten years old to become learned Buddhists. Most of them did not return after going off to serve their mandatory military duty, because they gave in to the temptations of the secular world. Whenever this happened, my heart would ache from their loss. Nevertheless, as long as young people would apply themselves to Buddhist education, I would always happily take them in. My disciples could not bear to see my repeated disappointment and would often try to dissuade me from taking in more kids by saying, “These kids will *not* remember what you’ve done for them!” Yet, whenever I told them, “I am perfectly willing,” they would agree in silence.

Twenty years have passed, and there are only a few of my original fifty novice monks left. For

example, Hui Lung and Hui Shang are now playing important roles in Fo Guang Shan. Although I have plowed more than harvested, I am satisfied. There are currently more than a hundred members in the training program for novice monks—three times as many as when I first started. Then again, how many will stay for good? Still, I am perfectly willing to teach them.

Fifty-four years ago, Venerables Nanting, Wuyi, and I established the Zhiguang School of Commerce. Later, my name ceased to appear in business correspondences and official documents. I was not even allowed to send representatives to the school meetings. Some thought this was unfair, but I would only respond with a smile. Similarly, there were countless setbacks in my attempts to promote Buddhist education. In 1980, when I set up the Graduate School of Indian Culture at the Chinese Culture University, I had to lecture as well as travel back and forth to raise funds. After three school terms, Chang Chi-yun, the founder, passed away, and the program was discontinued. Once again, my efforts were fruitless. Not the least upset, I continued to be perfectly willing to educate gifted Buddhists. Eventually, the university president wanted to see the study of Buddhism

reestablished and asked me to reopen the graduate school: the light of truth will always shine!

Much time has passed since then. Today, Buddhist education centers include University of the West, Fo Guang University and many Chinese schools overseas, as well as six Buddhist colleges and Pumen High School in Taiwan. I keep reminding myself, “For the sake of education, I will always be perfectly willing to face adversities and challenges of all forms.” I have exhausted myself preparing for Buddhist lectures. I have confronted the authorities fighting for freedom to spread Buddhism. I have preached using innovative, modern techniques, only to be criticized by conservatives. I have regularly resorted to scrimping and saving to afford lecture tours far and wide. Some people might ask why; the cause of education, after all, sees no immediate results. It takes years of hard work, and it is easy to forget just what you’re working towards. In spite of this, I am perfectly willing, and it is this mindset that makes the struggle joyous.

At twenty-eight, I went on a lecture tour to the eastern part of Taiwan. To save on shipping expenses, I lugged around a heavy projector all the time. This resulted in serious arthritis. Somehow, when the



doctor told me I might lose my legs, I was neither afraid nor regretful because I was perfectly willing to do what I could to spread Buddhism. On the positive side, I thought losing my legs might even enable me to spend more time reading and writing while still advocating Buddhism. At the time, I was so engaged in my work, I forgot about the arthritis. Miraculously, it went away, and I recovered.

For ten years, I continued to travel every week between Ilan and Kaohsiung to lecture. I went on foot to remote temples. As the years went by, invitations to lecture took up so much of my schedule that I got used to eating and sleeping in cars and on planes while traveling miles from continent to continent, city to city. Even though I retired from the abbotship of Fo Guang Shan in 1985, I still attend meetings. Whenever there is a request, I will always be there.

Perfectly Willing to Cultivate the Buddhist Community

When I first decided to establish Fo Guang Shan, devotees were taken aback by the thorny, thicket-covered hills where we were supposed to start building. They thought that with Shoushan Temple established, building another temple in the mountains was

not necessary. The idea of building temples overseas was not favored by many, either. Their objectives might have been valid, but I still felt that, in order to provide a home for Buddhist disciples and deliverance for the people, I would be perfectly willing to take on any task.

After Fo Guang Shan was founded, we helped build local roads and bridges, established schools and charity programs, and contributed diligently toward community development. However, some villagers wanted more. A few of them even hurt monastics and defamed Buddhism. Some people complained about spending on temples outside Taiwan, not realizing that these temples are really generous gifts to the rest of the world and a necessary part of propagating the Dharma. While poverty-stricken, Taiwan had once received aid from the United States. Now that the country had recovered, it should be our turn to be a generous giver. How deplorable that some of us are not willing to reciprocate hospitality. Duty-bound in the spread of Buddhism and with no regrets, I was perfectly willing to tolerate all such slander.

In sheer enthusiasm, I have lectured on Buddhist principles using the most modern methods available, managed temples in a democratic way, related

Buddhism to real life, and taken Buddhism to an international stature. In willingness and compassion, I strive for the goals of relieving suffering, bringing happiness, and benefiting all beings. With humbleness, I provide guidance to everyone. I am concerned with the affairs of the country and do not hesitate to speak for the people. I would respectfully entertain believers and political figures alike at the temple and just as gladly offer lectures to the military.

On some clear nights in self-reflection, I realize that for Buddhism and the sangha, I have done my best, and for my country and its people, I have given every effort. For all my small intentions, I have never expected to be appreciated and least of all to be called a “business monk” or the “political monk.” Nonetheless, I am perfectly willing to bear it all as part of a broader path for the spread of Buddhism.

Some people envy me for my increasing number of disciples, but few realize the hardships that come as a result. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* states:

*All the passions are the disciples,
Transformed at will.*

I console, encourage, and lecture my followers, all of whom have different personalities. I solve

their problems and provide them with the appropriate environment in which to learn, opportunities for further study, peaceful and quiet accommodations, and various other facilities and benefits. I protect and care for them as I would tend delicate orchids. It is certainly a pleasure to see many become appreciative, but I am always saddened by those who break with their faith. About forty years ago, I remember supporting two sisters through their medical school education. Upon graduating, not only did they fail to contribute to the sangha but also looked down on other disciples. After getting an education, some followers have become arrogant and left the temple to work for other organizations. Rather than being concerned over efforts wasted and hopes destroyed, I worry most about their well-being. Once outside the mountain gate, will they lose their way in the secular world?

Fortunately, I have many outstanding disciples who have dedicated their lives to Buddhism and to the people. Hsin Ping, kind and generous, was perfectly willing to follow me in the early years of Fo Guang Shan. He had taken over all responsibilities and debts since my retirement. Always determined and never discouraged, he had never regretted committing

himself to this life. Tzu Chuang, gentle and patient, wore high heels while walking from household to household delivering Buddhist texts forty years ago, before she became a Buddhist nun. Later, she went to the United States and spent ten years dealing with the hardships of bringing about the construction and completion of Hsi Lai Temple. She has always been perfectly willing to take responsibilities and accept blame. Talented Tzu Hui gave up a well-paying job to be my interpreter in the propagation of Buddhism. She also taught at a university. Tzu Jung, capable and experienced, has been perfectly willing in assuming responsibility for spreading Buddhism and benefiting people since becoming a Buddhist in 1953. Despite her physical fragility, she remains in charge of Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) in the Republic of China, working hard with little rest. Tzu Chia, in her serenity, has been perfectly willing in dedicating herself to educating sangha members in the monasteries for thirty years since her return from studying in Japan. There are also Tzu Yi, Hsin Ting, Yi Yen, Yi Heng, Hui Kai, Yi Kung, Yi Ti, Yi Chun, and Yi Fa, as well as others from later years, such as Man Cheng,⁴ who are perfectly

4 滿乘, disciple of Venerable Master Hsing Yun.

willing to spread Mahayana Buddhism; Lee In-ok from Korea is perfectly willing to come and serve at the BLIA since her graduation from the National Cheng Kung University. I would urge all aspiring Buddhist disciples to be perfectly willing to dedicate themselves and maintain a perfectly willing attitude as they strive for their goals. All hardships and obstacles will mean nothing in comparison to our commitment. All restrictions in life will be undone. There will be little that cannot be attained and no wishes will be left unfulfilled.

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