

## 忠 Loyalty (2006/2021)

The Chinese character for loyalty is the Center character (i.e., 中) over the heart character (i.e. 心), which means that you do your utmost to keep your heart unbiased. Therefore, loyalty is not only dealing with people with the utmost effort and sincerity, but our mental attitude should be centered like a plumb line which shows the correct position, impartially, without shortfall or excess. If our mental attitude is slightly biased, we tend to be weak or extreme, etc., which defies the righteous spirit of being loyal. For example, happiness is everyone's right, but many people put themselves first, so they are not loyal to others but are biased towards themselves. If everyone is partial to oneself and ignores the right of others to be happy, then the family will not be a family because the sense of loyalty to work together and share the joys and sorrows is gone; friends will not be friends because the faithful consciousness of mutual caring and helping each other is gone. The group will not be a group because the sense of loyalty to serve people and society is gone. Similarly, a country can be trapped in a situation where no one is loyal to the country, and it is easy to lose order and lose a country. If this befalls all countries, the world will become chaotic. Then, the pursuit of self-interest would turn out to be a futile effort!

In times of war, it is easy to see that disloyalty is on display in the form of betraying one's own country or friends for one's safety. In the quest for fame and fortune, there are also many treacherous infidelities such as betrayal of friends due to conflicts of interest! Even in daily life, there are displays of loyalty to the self when one puts his own happiness first. For example, a family man who only cares about himself may go and have fun after work with his friends. Although this person behaves himself and provides for his family and his actions cannot be considered a betrayal or abandonment of his family, this kind of behavior shows a weak loyalty to the family. On the other hand, there is a kind of loyalty that is extreme and which is derived from the pain of others. For example, when trying to win, a team uses ruthless tactics to harm the opposing team during the game, that is extreme loyalty. In the above examples, no matter which way bias is displayed, they all share the same goal of pursuing personal interests, and they have completely abandoned the spirit of loyalty, which requires a person to be impartial when dealing with matters.

Disloyalty is a label that people loathe and thus avoid. However, some people, unknowingly and incomprehensibly, are less loyal than cows and horses! If people know and comprehend that their disloyal behavior will bring about bad consequences such as family turmoil or a stained reputation, who would be willing to wreck themselves by going against the principle of loyalty? The reason is that people's understanding of the well-known virtue of loyalty is to do their utmost to be loyal, but fail to grasp that it also requires an impartial attitude. Righteousness and impartiality are not easy to grasp at a glance, but the examples of loyalty that have appeared in history are inseparable from the words and deeds of being loyal to others, like being loyal to one's duties, being loyal with daring attitude, and being loyal to one's highest beliefs and faithfulness. It is also inseparable from the ideals and ambitions of being loyal to the world, such as: "Being loyal is to serve all the known interests of the public," "my worry coming before the world worries," and "another's hunger is my hunger."

Judging from the quotations of loyalty above, if we want to be upright and impartial, we must take loyalty to others and serving the world as our responsibility, rather than being partial to ourselves. Not being self-serving is what some people find hard to understand about loyalty. They naively believe that if they only care about others, they can't benefit themselves! In fact, if you truly apply loyalty in your life and actions, when weighing the importance of matters, you must choose the essence that is beyond self-importance; when weighing the effectiveness of matters, you must choose what will yield more far-reaching results than yourself. This kind of selfless action is a challenge to transcend one's own goals, but it also invisibly adds new meaning to one's life. So that one's life is no longer an ordinary hustle for oneself, but is close to the wonderful and happy life that Fan Zhongyan, a political thinker in the Northern Song Dynasty, described: "my happiness coming after the world happiness!"

Therefore, it can be understood that those who are loyal beyond their personal ideals will definitely share pain and woe in adversity. In Cai Gen Tan's book, he reinforces this concept to exhort people to aspire to greatness: "Setting goals in life no higher than lifting our feet is like dusting off our clothes in a filthy area or washing our dirty feet in muddy water. This is no way to achieve a distinctive accomplishment." When this inspirational sentence is considered in terms of loyalty, it requires the ambitions and goals set by people to be broader and loftier than those of individuals. Only when you achieve for others can you surpass yourself in the end.

Owing to the altruistic power of loyalty which transcends personal needs, it naturally engenders loyalty to family, friends, and one's country. Don't underestimate this kind of loyalty, which seemingly does not prioritize the self. It will not only inspire a new vitality in life to achieve goals, but also lead to coordinated efforts to engage with the world. Take loyalty to the family as an example. If all the members of the family do not have the same mentality of transcending individual needs and working together to build a family, then the use of money, the investment of time and the division of housework will become points of contention. If the members of a group or family only undertake affairs for their own personal needs, the dynamics will not be harmonious because people within a community follow one another and no one will put forth any extra efforts for others.

Therefore, if you want to apply loyalty with proficiency and not focus on personal needs, you must first know your strengths, your usefulness, and where your aspirations lie. Only then can you clearly know your own value and how you can benefit yourself and others. This is a matter of honesty and not perfunctory. If people have nothing to be loyal to, it is easy for them to be confused and to envy another's fame or fortune or to become preoccupied with looking good to others. This kind of mentality not only deprecates one's own role, but creates suffering. Because if we are not careful, we will develop a greedy and grasping attitude, so that insufficiency and dissatisfaction will become the mainstream of our thinking, and we will futilely invest our mind and emotions in looking everywhere to try to discover where our loyalty should lie!

Imagine a not far away classroom where a student is asked about the work of his father and he is too shy to answer. After running home from class, he angrily asks his father why he is a mere blue collar worker, instead of an engineer, doctor, or lawyer, like his peers' parents. His father calmly replies, "In society, everyone has different contributions and purpose. Although selling flowers may seem unattractive to some, the beauty of the world and life is enhanced by the colorful flowers I sell every day."

After the father finishes, he sees that his son is still a little depressed, so he continues to soothe him and says, "Actually, each person is like a unique flower in the garden of this world. They have natural beauty in their true appearance. There is no need to envy others, or force yourself to become someone else. As long as everyone works hard to exude the fragrance inherent in oneself, there is no need to be artificial and one's fragrance will naturally arise."

Although this elementary school student may be childish, his mentality does not differ so much from that of today's parents who expect their children to become high achieving dragons and phoenixes. How is it different from the mentality of posting photos and videos on the Internet to compete for validation through "likes" to the posts? The role of life goes beyond being admired by others; it includes inspiring others. What is enviable is mostly visible ostentation which increases people's covetousness and it is a mixture of a competing and demanding spirit; what is inspiring is mostly invisible, but it can influence people to let go of fame and fortune, because of the spirit of charity and tolerance. Therefore, we should not look at celebrities who have achieved fame and fortune with envy. As long as we are loyal to our own roles and have goals and purpose that go beyond our own personal benefit, we will integrate ourselves and our work into one. Even a florist can have an inspiring and positive life whose contributions can benefit others and transform society.

When we are at ease and loyal to what we have, our body and mind will naturally be harmonious and become a refuge where we can rest and settle, so as to relieve our body and mind from rushing outward and onward. If you are faithful to what you have, this inner physical and mental home will be spacious and comfortable, and it will be the best place for you to calm down and heal your tired body and mind. In Chinese, the word "center" in "community center" is a place where people gather together. In addition to seeking happiness from transcending personal interests, it is also a metaphor for everyone fusing together through loyalty, so that the community center becomes an outer home in which the masses can place their trust to reliably gather. In other words, loyalty is the integration of individual consciousness into the group, and the group stands for the country and then the world at large. It is permeated with the goal of participation rather than division, tolerance rather than resistance.

However, some forms of loyalty nowadays are displayed through wild and fierce attacks upon opponents, a kind of "fanatical loyalty". Fanatical loyalty is a symbol of hostility and resistance and contains the extreme mentality of dividing clans, factions, religions, and races against others. As a result, there are many divisions such as racial divides, attacks caused by discrimination, and hatred based on religious hostilities. These discriminating and extreme loyalists may seem very loyal in their behavior, words and deeds, but, in fact, their actions contradict the meaning of loyalty, which is aimed at the common welfare. They are mired in the quicksand of who is to blame, which escalates into hatred, killing, and transgressions aimed at harming others, poisoning society and dividing the world! From this, it can be seen that the meanings of loyalty and fanaticism are generally confused, which has led to the consequences of so many horrible things in the world!

Loyalty can create a common will that forms a strong fort because everyone has a common goal beyond personal aspirations, and it has an invincible spiritual perseverance. In contrast, if the power of loyalty is used as a spiritual weapon of destruction, the consequences will be dire. Looking at those places where loyalty is used as a weapon to harm, what is left are mostly craters and scars rather than dwellings amidst verdant greeneries. Therefore, loyalty requires us not to blindly agree or follow emotional behavior, but to be unyielding, unbiased, and conscientiously loyal to oneself and others. We have to be unwaveringly loyal to ourselves and others, as well as to the group, but we must be very clear about the aspirations and motives of their actions. Is it driven by the loyalty to benefit people, or is it tied to loyal fanaticism that creates disaster? Beneficial loyalty must be for the purpose of promoting the group's harmony within families, friends and neighbors, the belief in racial equality and reciprocal mutual benefits, the mission of religions to save the world and to save people, and the ideals of peaceful coexistence of all countries. This is what we can all devote ourselves to. The fanatical loyalty that causes disasters is the utmost foolishness which lacks the spirit of harmony!

Loyalty, whether for oneself or the external world, is to have a "physical and mental home" where one can rest in the unity of the body and mind. When the body and mind are united, one can work toward the goal with an unwavering mind. Who in the world wouldn't like to meet someone who is devoted to them wholeheartedly? It is not easy to achieve impartial loyalty, so we often have the painful choice between loyalty to a country and filial piety to parents all at the same time! Therefore, in order to do it properly, we need to be singularly loyal, and we can not only be loyal to one's country, but also be loyal to the livelihood of all mankind; we can not only be loyal to a certain race, but also be loyal to the evolution of all mankind. We can not only be loyal to just one religion, but also be loyal to the awakening of all mankind. Because with this all-encompassing loyalty, we can jointly seek happiness for all mankind and ease the suffering of the world. With this boundless loyalty, we are standing on this round Earth that has neither corners nor boundaries, no matter where we stand, we will be precisely at the impartial center of the world!



## 恕 **Forgiveness** (2002)

Forgiveness is acceptance and understanding, and unforgiveness is the psychological tendency of holding grudges, complaining, and being unhappy. I believe everyone will agree that, from infancy to adulthood, whether life is leisurely or rigorous, what we pursue every day should be to find a happy life. In the search for happiness, we rely on people and things as the sources of happiness, and yet take for granted that they are catalysts of our happiness. However, in the natural law of gains and losses, successes and failures, likes and dislikes, love and hate, etc., which inevitably arise, our requirements and expectations for happiness often collide with reality. Losing people or things that we passionate about, even when there is no argument and contention, cracks the foundation of our happiness which immediately becomes a source of anguish. If we are careless, this bitterness is buried inside our hearts!

No one deliberately looks for unhappiness, but we often find unhappiness while looking for happiness; no one deliberately holds onto unhappiness, but we often attract unhappiness while discharging unhappiness! Happiness can be said to exist because of our craving, but why does unhappiness exist? Is it because of unsatisfactory things, or because of our agitated thinking? I once read about someone who went to see a psychiatrist for the first time. He was wearing well-pressed suit and fashionable clothes. He seemed to be a middle-aged man with a successful career. The psychiatrist asked him what was the purpose of his visit. The middle-aged man replied that he was troubled by his divorce. The doctor asked him what was wrong. The middle-aged man began to speak of his ex-wife's various faults. The condemnation, self-pity and indignation in his words stirred up his innermost emotions. He became agitated and then complained loudly. Not long after, blue veins bulged on his neck, and he was furious. The vivid memories of the divorce made the man feel as if it had just happened! When the middle-aged person paused for a moment, the doctor asked, with concern, when the divorce occurred. The middle-aged person said: "More than ten years ago"!

In the long ten plus years following his divorce, this man had cultivated deep resentment and anger within his heart like tinder. We exist because we have the present moment; we have an unhappy existence because we live in the past. Therefore, as long as the man thought about the divorce, even just for a moment, the tinder of resentment slowly revived his past anger; as he continued to talk about it, his fury was fueled by his negative emotions! If people hold on to this type of "tinder" in their hearts, no matter how successful they are in their careers or how rich they are, they will certainly not be able to keep their happiness! They can instantly wipe out everything they have and live in the unhappy time and space of the past. However, many people ignore the unforgiving "tinder" which disturbs their tranquil heart, consumes their spirit and time, and causes them frustration and sickness.

There are basically two types of unforgivable matters in the mind. One is to blame ourselves for past mistakes, and the other is to blame others for the faults. If you blame yourself, please remember, "to err is human"! No matter how deep we are in the mud, we must always have hope in life and let ourselves forge a new path. Mencius said: "People often make mistakes and therefore are ever improving." That is, people can often self-correct in order to improve. Thus, don't be discouraged, because what happened will definitely have something to do with our growth. Moreover, past events are the embellishment of life, and should be used as lessons and experiences for learning, not for self-bashing. As long as we don't repeat the same mistakes and accept every moment of the present frankly and without resistance, it's better than self-blaming and self-pity, which are both a mistake and block the vision of continuous advancement in life. If we can't forgive ourselves, our spirit lives in the past and goes against our life in the present moment. We will gradually detach from our social groups and develop low self-esteem, which will lead to depression and other mental illnesses.

There is another kind of unforgivable matter in our mind, which is the insistence that others have treated us improperly. It is usually provoked by a bad word or a misstep by others during the course of our daily pursuit of fame and wealth, or venturing into various entertainment activities that stumble us in an unfavorable situation, etc. In order to evade responsibilities for mistakes or setbacks, the simplest and most accustomed action is to blame others! For example, if we lack knowledge, we accuse the teacher of poor teaching; if money is tight, we accuse others of stealing our business; if the marriage is unhappy, we accuse our partner of being inconsiderate. When we are at odds with our parents, brothers, and sisters, we accuse them of not knowing how to behave and so on. It seems that everyone who mistreats us has a choice to treat us better, but we also have the choice to be more forgiving of others!

Blame shifting and displacing anger upon others are our passive way of handing off our responsibility to control ourselves as human being to other people. Besides, when people behave poorly, it's their bad habits, and that's their business. If we allow them to incite our anger and worry, it's our own foolishness and ignorance for letting other people's faults punish ourselves with unhappiness!

What's more, some people abdicate their own responsibility for their daily happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy onto others. Others can make us happy, no need to say more there, because those moments are usually the easiest to forget. However, we often complain that our Parents' control is overwhelming; the boss's harsh pressure is stressful; the children's laziness is disappointing; the friend's selfishness superseding righteousness hurts my soul; this person's behavior angers me; today's weather is depressing. These disenchantments or unforgiving feelings are blamed on others. We don't realize that we are the masters of our own universe and must take full responsibility for our personal happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy. No matter what unsatisfactory situation is, we can choose to accept it, instead of blaming others angrily! No matter how much we grumble at every possible scenario or how meticulously we blame every dissatisfaction on others, the problems we encounter will not be solved by this, and we will be as unhappy as before!

An unforgivable matter, which is also an unpleasant problem in our hearts, is not a life experience that can help us avoid repeating the same mistakes. For examples, in a friendship break up, people usually would break up from the same tendency of issues; and for arguing situation, people would prone to argue for the same disputes endlessly. With an unforgiving heart, even if we can move into a new environment and change to different personnel surrounding, our unhappy social or professional encounters follow us, like new renditions of old songs that continuously reappear in our lives.

Therefore, we should forgive any unpleasant matters and turn them into learning experiences. We should be learners in the journey of life, rather than a person who only knows how to blame and not to forgive. The attitude of a learner asks, what have I learned from this event? A learner does not try hard to blame others for doing this or doing that because he or she knows that it is a waste of time and energy to blame or find other people's faults. If we have this attitude, even if we encounter setbacks, we will surely be able to get through the predicament! It is like the ancients said: "For people of introspection, all mishaps that they encounter are helpful medicine; For people who seek to blame others, every thought that they think becomes a harmful spear!" Therefore, if there is an issue related to profit, we should consider that profit is what everyone wants in their hearts, and we should not be the only one to gain; if there is an issue related to humiliation, we should consider that humiliation is what no one wants, and we should not think that only others deserve to be put down; Grudged by defamation, we should consider that some encounters in life are smooth and some are rough. Why do we always believe we should encounter smooth sailing? when resentment develops due to another's unreasonable condemning and admonition, we should consider how our own temperament can swing between the good and the bad. Why do we demand that others must be good all the time?

Therefore, when there is something unpleasant, we must think for others so that we can use forgiveness at hand. If we don't forgive in time, the grievances will pile up and intensify. Many times, we wait for the "fire" in our hearts to burn out of control, then we go from yelling to physically hurting one another, before trying to figure out how to solve it. At this time, we fall into the trap of making things difficult rather than making things easy, which is a common problem that everyone commits. A tree with a trunk as thick as your embrace was born from a tiny seed. If we want to uproot a tree with a trunk that fits our embrace, it is a million times more difficult than picking up the seed of this huge tree. Similarly, our forgiveness is usually focused on the aftermath rather than prevention!

If we focus our forgiveness on prevention first, then we can imagine that someone who is condemning us may be in a bad mood because he or she is facing some adversity, and we should give him or her sympathy instead of anger. When being taken advantage of by others, we should consider that this person's life or morality is troubled, and we should be concerned instead of resentful. If we put people first, how can we accumulate grievances in our hearts? If you have grievances and want to hold a grudge for life, thinking that you can never let go of others. In fact, you are just the person who does not let yourself free for life by forgiving others. You are only imprisoning yourself that has nothing to do with others! Making yourself unhappy has nothing to do with others!

In fact, whether we are happy or not really has nothing to do with other people and matters. For example, a gorgeous dress would not make me happy, but receiving many compliments would make me happy. Relatively, the old, worn-out clothing doesn't make me unhappy, but other's condescension about my clothes would make me sad and ashamed. Our happiness and shame seem to be completely caused by other people and matters, but if we do not aware of it, and do not see or hear the compliments or deprecations others utter, we can be sure that we are completely clueless and indifferent. However, once we hear other people's appraisal, we will inevitably choose what sounds good to be happy, and become unhappy with what sounds bad. Therefore, we feel slandered and humiliated by others' criticism, whether they are true or not; we feel ridiculed and ashamed by others' ridicule, whether it is right or wrong; we feel like we are floating with joy from other's praise, whether it is sincere or false. From these examples, we can infer that the praise or condescension of others has nothing to do with our happiness and sadness. We have cultivated the values of praise or derogation since we were young and they have become more important than our own ability to appreciate ourselves. It's all because we often focus on people and things as the basis of our happiness!

Our happiness cannot rely on people and things, it comes from whether we have a peaceful and comfortable heart. Forgiveness is not only being magnanimous and forgiving of others, but also to let go of resentment and sadness in order to regain peace and comfort of the heart. For a long time, we thought that forgiveness was a kind of mental consciousness geared towards the external matter, in a way to relax the tension between people and things. This leads us to believe that it takes magnanimity as vast as the ocean to be able to forgive others. Then, we start to think analytically to identify this epic path of forgiveness. The knowledge of forgiving oneself, forgiving others, forgiving everything, and so on, may be learned with confidence for a while, but as soon as confronting with adversity, our resentful thinking will prevail over the cultivation of forgiveness. Because if we forgive through analytical thinking and considerations, we will inevitably judge the event from the past and even into the future for self-benefit. However, the unhappy events from the past will only cause more regrets; the layers of possibilities in the future are difficult to fathom and predict, and moving forward would only add more worrying! If our minds become aware that forgiveness can have the negative connotations of low self-esteem, failure, renunciation, or escape from life's challenges, then our spirit will churn even more and become more resistant to things, and forgiveness will be even more out of reach!

Therefore, analytical thinking cannot forgive, only we can, because thinking can only resist, and only we can accept. We must realize that thinking is not me, but just an ingenious tool we have which is mixed with prejudice and consciousness. Forgiveness can give us peace and, on the contrary, unforgiveness can make us upset and miserable. Therefore, why use thoughts to selectively forgive? Let's not ever put forgiveness high up on the throne of our hearts with which to lord over and judge others around us, and not forget that is used to peace our inner world. When our inner world is peaceful and comfortable, the outer world will naturally correspond. Therefore, if you want to have a happy life, you must forgive the grievances in your heart, and, moreover, you must forgive the condemnations in your heart right now, so as not to deepen the grievances. We need to forgive one step at a time, one moment at a time, neither groveling nor arrogant, and let the current of life flow through every minute and every second. The moments of peace and tranquility will appear in the present, and happiness is nothing but a part of this tranquility.