



Guidelines for  
Being a Good Person

弟子規

Dì Zǐ Guī



# Guidelines for Being a Good Person

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**Translation by the  
Pure Land Translation Team**

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In deep appreciation,  
and with the utmost respect,  
this book is for our teacher  
Venerable Master Chin Kung



## PREFACE

This book is a translation of *Di Zi Gui*, a book of maxims that was written by ancient Chinese sages. Memorized by children when they were young, the book provided guidelines that would enable them to learn how to become good children and students and, later, good parents, friends, and citizens.

In the translation, we endeavored to remain as faithful as possible to the Chinese text. At times, we chose to be less literal to make the ancient text more relevant for a modern, universal readership. And so, ink blocks and brushes became writing tools, and horses became bicycles, but the underlying principles did not change.

To the casual reader, the maxims can appear to be straightforward and easy to carry out. But when trying to put them into practice, one discovers that they are anything but easy, or simple. Neither are they just for children. These principles for behavior can guide us the rest of our lives.

Venerable Wuling  
Toowoomba, Australia



# CONTENTS

## 目錄

### mù lù

#### Outline

總敘 zǒng xù

1. Respecting and Loving our Parents at Home 1

第一章 入則孝 rù zé xiào

2. Interacting with Others Away from Home 6

第二章 出則弟 chū zé dì

3. Being Mindful in Daily Life 10

第三章 謹 jǐn

4. Being Trustworthy 15

第四章 信 xìn

5. Loving All Beings 21

第五章 汎愛眾 fàn ài zhòng

6. Being Close to Kind and Virtuous People 27

第六章 親仁 qīn rén

7. After Doing the Above, the Arts Come Next 29

第七章 餘力學文 yú lì xué wén



GUIDELINES FOR  
BEING A GOOD PERSON

弟子規

Dì Zǐ Guī

OUTLINE

總 敘

zǒng xù

*Di Zi Gui* was written by ancient Chinese sages. It teaches us the guidelines for being a good human being.

First, it teaches us to respect and love our parents, and to be kind to our siblings.

Second, it teaches us how to interact with people and engage in daily tasks.

弟 子 規 聖 人 訓 首 孝 弟 次 謹 信

dì zǐ guī shèng rén xùn shǒu xiào tì cì jǐn xìn

It also teaches us to be a trustworthy person.

Furthermore, it teaches us to love all beings and to be close to kind, virtuous people.

Having learned how to do all these, we can then expand our horizons by studying the arts.

汎 愛 眾 而 親 仁 有 餘 力 則 學 文

fàn ài zhòng ér qīn rén yǒu yú lì zé xué wén

~ 1 ~

## Respecting and Loving our Parents at Home

入 則 孝

rù zé xiào



When our parents call us, we should answer them right away. When they tell us to do something, we should do it promptly.

父 母 呼 應 勿 緩

fù mǔ hū yīng wù huǎn

父 母 命 行 勿 懶

fù mǔ mìng xíng wù lǎn

When our parents instruct us, we should listen respectfully. When they scold us, we should sincerely accept what they say.

父 母 教 須 敬 聽      父 母 責 須 順 承  
fù mǔ jiào xū jìng tīng      fù mǔ zé xū shùn chéng

We should make sure that our parents are warm in the winter and cool in the summer. In the morning, we should greet them and show them that we care. At night, we should make sure that they are resting comfortably.

冬 則 溫 夏 則 清      晨 則 省 昏 則 定  
dōng zé wēn xià zé jìng      chén zé xǐng hūn zé dìng

Before going out, we should let our parents know. When we return, we should tell them that we are back. We should lead a routine life, and we should not be constantly changing our mind in whatever we do.

出 必 告 反 必 面      居 有 常 業 無 變  
chū bì gù fǎn bì miàn      jū yǒu cháng yè wú biàn

Even when a matter is trivial, we should not act without permission or just do as we please. If we do so, then we are no longer a dutiful child.

事 雖 小 勿 擅 為      苟 擅 為 子 道 虧  
shì suī xiǎo wù shàn wéi      gǒu shàn wéi zǐ dào kuī

We should not hide any possession, no matter how small, from our parents. If we do, they will feel hurt.

物 雖 小 勿 私 藏      苟 私 藏 親 心 傷  
wù suī xiǎo wù sī cáng      gǒu sī cáng qīn xīn shāng

When something pleases our parents [and is proper], we should try our best to provide it for them. When something displeases them, we should remove it.

親 所 好 力 為 具      親 所 惡 謹 為 去  
qīn suǒ hào lì wèi jù      qīn suǒ wù jǐn wèi qù

If we injure ourselves, we will make our parents worry. If we do something unvirtuous, they will feel ashamed.

身 有 傷 貽 親 憂      德 有 傷 貽 親 羞  
shēn yǒu shāng yí qīn yōu      dé yǒu shāng yí qīn xiū

When our parents love us, it is easy to be respectful and loving. When they do not love us, respecting and loving them means we have a noble heart.

親愛我孝何難      親憎我孝方賢  
qīn ài wǒ xiào hé nán      qīn zēng wǒ xiào fāng xián

If our parents do something wrong, we should urge them to change. Do so with a kind expression and caring voice.

親有過諫使更      怡吾色柔吾聲  
qīn yǒu guò jiàn shǐ gēng      yí wú sè róu wú shēng

Should our parents not accept our advice, try again when they are in a better mood. If they still do not listen, our sincere tears will show them how deeply we care. Should they get angry with us, do not hold it against them.

諫不入悅復諫      號泣隨撻無怨  
jiàn bù rù yuè fù jiàn      háo qì suí tà wú yuàn

When our parents are ill, we should make sure that they take the right medicine. Care for them night and day, and do not leave them alone.

親 有 疾 藥 先 嘗      晝 夜 侍 不 離 床  
qīn yǒu jí yào xiān cháng      zhòu yè shì bù lí chuáng

For three years after our parent's passing, we should remember them in sadness. We should live simply and not adorn our home. Avoid merry-making, meat, and alcohol.

喪 三 年 常 悲 咽      居 處 變 酒 肉 絕  
sāng sān nián cháng bēi yè      jū chù biàn jiǔ ròu jué

We should arrange our parent's funeral in a proper manner. We should always honor them as if they were still alive and, especially on the anniversary of their death, remember them with a sincere heart.

喪 盡 禮 祭 盡 誠      事 死 者 如 事 生  
sāng jìn lǐ jì jìn chéng      shì sǐ zhě rú shì shēng

~ 2 ~

## Interacting with Others Away from Home

出 則 弟

chū zé dì



Older siblings should love and care for the younger ones; younger siblings should love and respect the older ones. Getting along well with one's siblings is a sign of respecting one's parents and caring that they are happy.

兄 道 友 弟 道 恭      兄 弟 睦 孝 在 中  
xiōng dào yǒu dì dào gōng      xiōng dì mù xiào zài zhōng

When siblings value family ties more than possessions, resentment will not arise. When siblings are careful with their words, feelings of anger naturally dissolve.

財物輕怨何生      言語忍忿自泯  
cái wù qīng yuàn hé shēng      yán yǔ rěn fèn zì mǐn

When drinking, eating, walking, or sitting, let elders do so first; younger ones follow.

或飲食或坐走      長者先幼者後  
huò yǐn shí huò zuò zǒu      zhǎng zhě xiān yòu zhě hòu

When an elder is asking for someone, find that person right away. If we cannot find that person, we should immediately report back and ask if we can help instead.

長呼人即代叫      人不在己即到  
zhǎng hū rén jí dài jiào      rén bú zài jǐ jí dào



When addressing elders, do not call them by their first name. When in the presence of elders, do not show off.

稱尊長勿呼名      對尊長勿見能  
chēng zūn zhǎng wù hū míng      duì zūn zhǎng wù xiàn néng

When meeting elders whom we know, greet them promptly and respectfully. If they do not greet us in return, respectfully stand aside.

路遇長疾趨揖      長無言退恭立  
lù yù zhǎng jí qū yī      zhǎng wú yán tuì gōng lì

If we are in a vehicle and see an elder whom we know passing by, we should get out and greet the person [if the situation safely allows]. We continue on our way only after the elder has left us.

騎下馬乘下車      過猶待百步餘  
qí xià mǎ chéng xià jū      guò yóu dài bǎi bù yú

When an elder is standing, do not sit. After an elder sits down, sit only when invited to do so.

長者立幼勿坐      長者坐命乃坐  
zhǎng zhě lì yòu wù zuò      zhǎng zhě zuò mìng nǎi zuò

Before an elder, speak softly. But if our voice is too low and hard to hear, we are being improper.

尊長前聲要低 低不聞卻非宜  
zūn zhǎng qián shēng yào dī dī bù wén què fēi yí

When meeting elders, walk briskly towards them; when leaving, do not do so in haste. When answering a question, look attentively at the person.

進必趨退必遲 問起對視勿移  
jìn bì qū tuì bì chí wèn qǐ duì shì wù yí

We should regard our aunts and uncles as if they were our parents, and our cousins as if they were our siblings.

事諸父如事父 事諸兄如事兄  
shì zhū fù rú shì fù shì zhū xiōng rú shì xiōng



~ 3 ~

## Being Mindful in Daily Life

謹

jǐn



Get up early and go to bed at a reasonable time.

Knowing how time flies, we should treasure every day.

朝起早夜眠遲 老易至惜此時

zhāo qǐ zǎo yè mián chí lǎo yì zhì xī cǐ shí

When we get up, we should wash our face and brush our teeth. After using the toilet, we should always wash our hands.

晨必盥兼漱口      便溺回輒淨手  
chén bì guàn jiān shù kǒu      biàn niào huí zhé jìng shǒu

Our hat should be properly put on, clothing correctly buttoned, and socks and shoes neatly worn.

冠必正紐必結      襪與履俱緊切  
guān bì zhèng niǔ bì jié      wà yǔ lǚ jù jǐn qiè

We should put our clothes away in their proper places. We should not leave them lying around for they will get dirty that way.

置冠服有定位      勿亂頓致污穢  
zhì guān fú yǒu dìng wèi      wù luàn dùn zhì wū huì

It is more important that our clothes be neat and clean than fashionable and expensive. We should wear what is suitable and appropriate for our age, and within our family's means.

衣貴潔不貴華      上循分下稱家  
yī guì jié bú guì huá      shàng xún fèn xià chèn jiā

When eating and drinking, do not be fussy. Eat only the right amount; do not overeat.

對 飲 食 勿 揀 擇      食 適 可 勿 過 則  
duì yǐn shí wù jiǎn zé      shí shì kě wù guò zé

When we are young, we should not drink alcohol. The behavior of those who are drunk is unsightly.

年 方 少 勿 飲 酒      飲 酒 醉 最 為 醜  
nián fāng shào wù yǐn jiǔ      yǐn jiǔ zuì zuì wéi chǒu

Walk in an unhurried manner and always stand up straight. Whether greeting friends or elders, do so properly and with respect.

步 從 容 立 端 正      揖 深 圓 拜 恭 敬  
bù cóng róng lì duān zhèng      yī shēn yuán bài gōng jìng

Do not step on doorsills or stand leaning on one leg. When sitting, do not sprawl or fidget.

勿 踐 闕 勿 跛 倚      勿 箕 踞 勿 搖 髀  
wù jiàn yù wù bì yǐ      wù jī jù wù yáo bì

When entering a room, we should open the door quietly.  
When walking, we should be aware of our surroundings  
so as not to bump into anything.

緩 揭 簾 勿 有 聲      寬 轉 彎 勿 觸 稜  
huǎn jiē lián wù yǒu shēng      kuān zhuǎn wān wù chù léng

Hold empty containers just as carefully as if they were  
full. Enter empty rooms as if they were occupied.

執 虛 器 如 執 盈      入 虛 室 如 有 人  
zhí xū qì rú zhí yíng      rù xū shì rú yǒu rén

Avoid doing things in a hurry, since acting in haste will  
lead to many mistakes. Do not be afraid of a task that is  
difficult or become careless when a job is easy.

事 勿 忙 忙 多 錯      勿 畏 難 勿 輕 略  
shì wù máng máng duō cuò      wù wèi nán wù qīng lüè

Keep away from rowdy places. Do not be curious about  
things that are bad or unusual.

鬥 鬪 場 絕 勿 近      邪 僻 事 絕 勿 問  
dòu nào chǎng jué wù jìn      xié pì shì jué wù wèn

When we are about to enter a house, we should ask if anyone is inside. As we enter, we should make ourselves heard.

將 入 門 問 孰 存      將 上 堂 聲 必 揚  
jiāng rù mén wèn shú cún      jiāng shàng táng shēng bì yáng

If someone asks who it is, we should say our name, not “me” because such a reply is not clear.

人 問 誰 對 以 名      吾 與 我 不 分 明  
rén wèn shéi duì yǐ míng      wú yǔ wǒ bù fēn míng

Before using something that belongs to another, we should ask for permission. If we do not ask, it is stealing.

用 人 物 須 明 求      倘 不 問 即 為 偷  
yòng rén wù xū míng qiú      tǎng bú wèn jí wéi tōu

After we borrow from others, we should return the items on time. Later, if we have an urgent need, we will be able to easily borrow from them again.

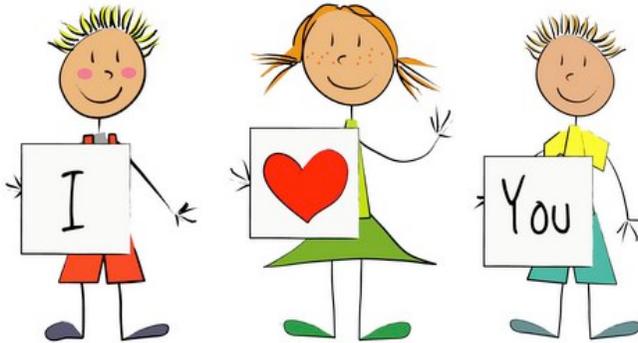
借 人 物 及 時 還      後 有 急 借 不 難  
jiè rén wù jí shí huán      hòu yǒu jí jiè bù nán

~ 4 ~

## Being Trustworthy

信

xìn



When we speak, honesty counts the most. Deceit and lies are unacceptable.

凡出言信為先

fán chū yán xìn wéi xiān

詐與妄奚可焉

zhà yǔ wàng xī kě yān

It is better to talk a little than chat too much.

Tell the truth; do not speak insincerely.

話 說 多 不 如 少      惟 其 是 勿 佞 巧  
huà shuō duō bù rú shǎo      wéi qí shì wù nìng qiǎo

Cunning, deceptive speech and foul language should never be used. We should never conduct ourselves in an unruly manner.

奸 巧 語 穢 污 詞      市 井 氣 切 戒 之  
jiān qiǎo yǔ huì wū cí      shì jǐng qì qiè jiè zhī

We should not readily talk about something we have not seen for it may not be the whole truth. We should not readily pass on to others what we do not know for sure.

見 未 真 勿 輕 言      知 未 的 勿 輕 傳  
jiàn wèi zhēn wù qīng yán      zhī wèi dì wù qīng chuán

If someone asks us to do something and we are not sure whether it is appropriate, we should not carelessly promise. If we do promise to do something [and it is inappropriate], we will be wrong whether we keep or break our promise.

事非宜勿輕諾      苟輕諾進退錯  
shì fēi yí wù qīng nuò      gǒu qīng nuò jìn tuì cuò

When speaking, say each word unhurriedly, clearly, and correctly. Do not mumble or talk too fast.

凡道字重且舒      勿急疾勿模糊  
fán dào zì zhòng qiě shū      wù jí jí wù mó hú

Some people like to gossip and comment about the faults or good points of others. But if something does not concern us, we should not get involved.

彼說長此說短      不關己莫閒管  
bǐ shuō cháng cǐ shuō duǎn      bù guān jǐ mò xián guǎn

When we see the goodness of others, we should encourage ourselves to learn from them. Even if we are far behind them, gradually we will achieve as they have.

見 人 善 即 思 齊      縱 去 遠 以 漸 躋  
jiàn rén shàn jí sī qí      zòng qù yuǎn yǐ jiàn jī

When we see the faults of others, we should reflect on our own behavior. If we have the same fault, correct it. If we do not have this fault, we should always be alert and not make the same mistake.

見 人 惡 即 內 省      有 則 改 無 加 警  
jiàn rén è jí nèi xǐng      yǒu zé gǎi wú jiā jǐng

When our morals, knowledge, and skills are not as good as those of others, we should encourage ourselves to try harder.

唯 德 學 唯 才 藝      不 如 人 當 自 礪  
wéi dé xué wéi cái yì      bù rú rén dāng zì lì

If the clothes we wear and the food we eat are not as good as what others have, do not feel sad.

若衣服若飲食 不如人勿生感  
ruò yī fú ruò yǐn shí bù rú rén wù shēng gǎn

If criticism makes us angry and compliments make us happy, we will attract bad company, while good friends will leave us.

聞過怒聞譽樂 損友來益友卻  
wén guò nù wén yù lè sǔn yǒu lái yì yǒu què

If we are appreciative of criticism and uneasy with compliments, people who are virtuous, sincere, and trustworthy will gradually become our friends.

聞譽恐聞過欣 直諒士漸相親  
wén yù kǒng wén guò xīn zhí liàng shì jiàn xiāng qīn

If we accidentally make a mistake, it is only an error. But if we do it on purpose, it is definitely wrong.

無心非名為錯 有心非名為惡  
wú xīn fēi míng wéi cuò yǒu xīn fēi míng wéi è

If we correct our faults and mistakes and do not repeat them, then they will cease. But if we try to cover them up, we will be doubly wrong.

過能改歸於無      倘揜飾增一辜  
guò néng gǎi guī yú wú      tǎng yǎn shì zēng yì gū

~ 5 ~

## Loving All Beings

汎愛眾

fàn ài zhòng



Love all beings, for we all live under the same sky and are supported by the same earth.

凡是人皆須愛 天同覆地同載

fán shì rén jiē xū ài tiān tóng fù dì tóng zài

A person of good character is highly respected. Respect is not based on external appearances.

行高者名自高 人所重非貌高  
xìng gāo zhě míng zì gāo rén suǒ zhòng fēi mào gāo

A capable person will naturally have a good reputation. People are not won over by boasting or self-praise.

才大者望自大 人所服非言大  
cái dà zhě wàng zì dà rén suǒ fú fēi yán dà

If we are good at something, we should be willing to use that ability to benefit others. When we feel others are more competent than us, we should not criticize or slander them for being so.

己有能勿自私 人所能勿輕訾  
jǐ yǒu néng wù zì sī rén suǒ néng wù qīng zǐ

Neither flatter the rich nor despise the poor. Neither ignore old friends nor take delight in only new ones.

勿諂富勿驕貧 勿厭故勿喜新  
wù chǎn fù wù jiāo pín wù yàn gù wù xǐ xīn

When others are busy, do not bother them. When they are troubled, do not make things worse by talking unnecessarily.

人 不 閒 勿 事 攪      人 不 安 勿 話 擾  
rén bù xián wù shì jiǎo      rén bù ān wù huà rǎo

We should neither expose the shortcomings of others nor disclose their private matters.

人 有 短 切 莫 揭      人 有 私 切 莫 說  
rén yǒu duǎn qiè mò jiē      rén yǒu sī qiè mò shuō

It is good to praise the virtuous actions of others. Knowing that they are being praised, people will be encouraged to do better.

道 人 善 即 是 善      人 知 之 愈 思 勉  
dào rén shàn jí shì shàn      rén zhī zhī yù sī miǎn

Gossiping about the wrongdoings of others is in itself wrong. When we slander another excessively, we too will suffer harm and great misfortune.

揚 人 惡 即 是 惡      疾 之 甚 禍 且 作  
yáng rén è jí shì è      jí zhī shèn huò qiě zuò

By mutually encouraging one another to do good, both of us will improve our characters. By not advising one another to correct our respective faults, our characters will diminish.

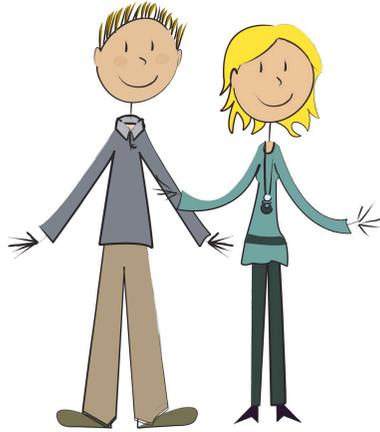
善相勸德皆建      過不規道兩虧  
shàn xiāng quàn dé jiē jiàn      guò bù guī dào liǎng kū

When giving and receiving, we should be clear in what we are doing. It is better to give more and receive less.

凡取與貴分曉      與宜多取宜少  
fán qǔ yǔ guì fēn xiǎo      yǔ yí duō qǔ yí shǎo

Before we ask others to do something, we should first ask ourselves if we would do it. If not, then we should not ask others to do it.

將加人先問己      己不欲即速已  
jiāng jiā rén xiān wèn jǐ      jǐ bú yù jí sù yǐ



We should repay the kindness of others; we should let go of our anger. Spend less time holding grudges and more time repaying kindness.

恩 欲 報 怨 欲 忘      報 怨 短 報 恩 長  
ēn yù bào yuàn yù wàng      bào yuàn duǎn bào ēn cháng

When we interact with people who serve us, we should act in ways that inspire respect. And while being dignified and proper is important, it is also important to be kind and generous.

待 婢 僕 身 貴 端      雖 貴 端 慈 而 寬  
dài bì pú shēn guì duān      suī guì duān cí ér kuān

If we force others to do as we wish, they will silently rebel. But if we convince them with sound reasoning, they will happily agree without complaining.

勢服人心不然      理服人方無言  
shì fú rén xīn bù rán      lǐ fú rén fāng wú yán

~ 6 ~

## Being Close to Kind and Virtuous People

親 仁  
qīn rén



We are all human beings, but we are not the same. Most of us are ordinary; only a few of us are kind and virtuous.

同 是 人 類 不 齊      流 俗 眾 仁 者 希  
tóng shì rén lèi bù qí      liú sú zhòng rén zhě xī

Truly virtuous people are held in awe by others. They are not afraid to speak the truth, and they do not fawn on others.

果仁者人多畏      言不諱色不媚  
guǒ rén zhě rén duō wèi      yán bú huì sè bú mèi

If we associate with and learn from people of great virtue, we will benefit greatly. Day by day our own virtues will grow and our faults will lessen.

能親仁無限好      德日進過日少  
néng qīn rén wú xiàn hǎo      dé rì jìn guò rì shǎo

If we do not associate with and learn from these people, we will suffer a great loss. We will attract people without virtue, and nothing we do will succeed.

不親仁無限害      小人進百事壞  
bù qīn rén wú xiàn hài      xiǎo rén jìn bǎi shì huài

~ 7 ~

## After Doing the Above, the Arts Come Next

餘力學文

yú lì xué wén



If we acquire knowledge but do not sincerely apply what we have learned, we will have only increased our conceit. What then will we become?

不 力 行 但 學 文      長 浮 華 成 何 人

bú lì xíng dàn xué wén      zhǎng fú huá chéng hé rén

If we are sincere in what we are doing but not acquiring knowledge, we will only be stubbornly following our viewpoints. We will never see the truth.

但力行不學文 任己見昧理真  
dàn lì xíng bù xué wén rèn jǐ jiàn mèi lǐ zhēn

When studying, our mind, eyes, and mouth must be focused on our learning. All three must be wholeheartedly dedicated to learning.

讀書法有三到 心眼口信皆要  
dú shū fǎ yǒu sān dào xīn yǎn kǒu xìn jiē yào

When reading a book, do not contemplate another. If we have not completed one, do not start another.

方讀此勿慕彼 此未終彼勿起  
fāng dú cǐ wù mù bǐ cǐ wèi zhōng bǐ wù qǐ

In our studies, we should set a reasonable timetable and then study hard. With enough time and effort, we will thoroughly understand the text.

寬為限緊用功 工夫到滯塞通  
kuān wéi xiàn jǐn yòng gōng gōng fū dào zhì sè tōng

If we have a question, we should make a note of it. Then ask someone who knows the answer.

心有疑隨札記      就人問求確義  
xīn yǒu yí suí zhá jì      jiù rén wèn qiú què yì

We should keep our room clean, our desk tidy, and our pens and pencils in their proper places.

房室清牆壁淨      几案潔筆硯正  
fáng shì qīng qiáng bì jìng      jǐ àn jié bǐ yàn zhèng

If we do not properly care for our writing tools, it shows carelessness. If our words are written sloppily, it shows disrespect.

墨磨偏心不端      字不敬心先病  
mò mó piān xīn bù duān      zì bú jìng xīn xiān bìng

Books should be organized and placed on the bookshelves in their proper places. After reading a book, we should put it back where it belongs.

列典籍有定處      讀看畢還原處  
liè diǎn jí yǒu dìng chù      dú kàn bì huán yuán chù

Even when in a hurry, we should carefully put our book away. If it is damaged, we should repair it.

雖 有 急 卷 束 齊      有 缺 壞 就 補 之  
suī yǒu jí juàn shù qí      yǒu quē huài jiù bǔ zhī

Do not read books that are untruthful or immoral, for these will block our wisdom and undermine our aspirations.

非 聖 書 屏 勿 視      蔽 聰 明 壞 心 志  
fēi shèng shū bǐng wù shì      bì cōng míng huài xīn zhì

We should not, because of our arrogance, harm ourselves by doing something improper. We should not, because of our lack of confidence, give up on ourselves. With effort, we will gradually become a noble person.

勿 自 暴 勿 自 棄      聖 與 賢 可 馴 致  
wù zì bào wù zì qì      shèng yǔ xián kě xún zhì



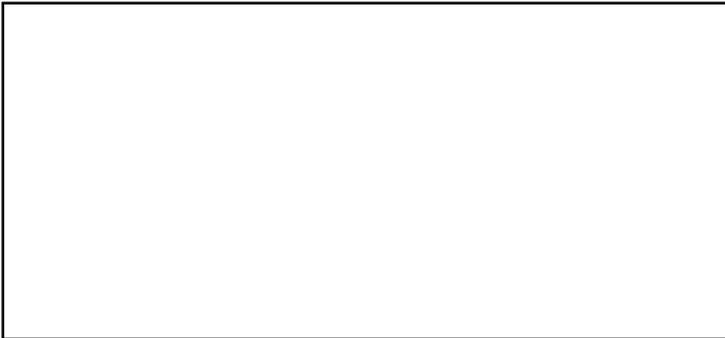


## DEDICATION OF MERIT

May the goodness  
from this book  
help to lessen  
the suffering of all beings  
and enable them  
to find lasting happiness.

Please visit  
[www.howwillbehavetoday.org](http://www.howwillbehavetoday.org)  
for the accompanying story book for  
*Guidelines for Being a Good Person*  
and  
[www.purelandcollege.org](http://www.purelandcollege.org) for a list of  
Pure Land centers and  
Amitabha Buddhist societies.

This book is provided with the compliments of





*Guidelines for Being a Good Person* is a translation of *Di Zi Gui*, a book of maxims that was written by ancient Chinese sages. Memorized by children when they were young, the book provided guidelines that would enable them to learn how to become a good child and student and, later, a good adult, parent, friend, and citizen.

To the casual reader, the maxims can appear to be straightforward and easy to carry out. But when trying to put them into practice, one discovers that they are anything but easy, or simple. Nor are they just for children.

These principles for behavior can guide us the rest of our lives.

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