The Inexorable Nether Laws

Shangguan Yuhua

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This painting depicts the Southern Three Sages: Earth Store Bodhisattva, Dharma Master Daoming, Dharma Protector Elder Min, together with the divine beast Diting. The sacred forms are true manifestations witnessed personally by the book's author laywoman, Shangguan Yuhua, during her spiritual journey through the netherworld. The image was painted devoutly by an artist, then revised under the guidance of Earth Store Bodhisattva, making it an extremely precious sacred icon.

Should viewers and fellow cultivators venerate, make offerings to, and recite sutras and mantras before the sacred images, misfortunes shall recede while blessings accumulate; households shall abide in lasting peace. Practitioners may attain rebirth in pure lands in this lifetime, and ultimately achieve full Buddhahood in future lives.

The meaning of the Chinese characters in the picture is:

As long as hells remain unemptied, I vow never to attain Buddhahood.

The Inexorable Nether Laws

Volume I

WRITTEN BY
SHANGGUAN YUHUA



Preface

The book *The Inexorable Nether Laws* was written by fellow practitioner Shangguan Yuhua with exhaustive energy and devotion. Throughout its composition, forces from the Three Realms—the upper realm, the middle realm and the lower realm—have lent their support. Heaven, earth, ghosts and spirits all place high hopes upon this book whose purpose is to reverse the declining moral climate and rectify people's minds. Following the ancient classic Precious Scroll of the Jade Calendar, it stands as another important work of the netherworld. Nowadays, the minds of people in human society have grown depraved and morality has collapsed. Therefore, the genuine truths of hell and the unseen nether world must be made known to all people, so as to save those destined beings whose virtuous roots have not yet been completely severed.

The netherworld grants this special dispensation precisely in accordance with Earth Store Bodhisattva's wish. All that is seen and heard within the hells shall be disclosed to living beings in the mortal realm. This unprecedented exception allows the initial manuscript of this book to be completed within this year, so as to avert great calamities in the human world.

All who uphold the laws of the netherworld shall ascend to the heavens and be erased from the rolls of the netherworld. If one dedicates the meritorious virtues of saving beings to one's own rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, one shall be reborn therein and attain the superior lotus grade. All disciples of the Three Jewels must uphold this book and practice accordingly in compliance with the teachings.

Whoever attains the Dharma shall deliver the nine generations of their descendants and seven generations of their ancestors to transcend the lower realms, freeing them from suffering and granting them bliss. For those who aspire to repay the four great

kindnesses above and save all sentient beings below, there is no greater deed than promoting, abiding by, and propagating this sacred text!

Written in the Year of Renchen Miaozheng, palms pressed together in reverence

0 / The Author's Preface

Amitabha! Greetings to all!

May the world abide in peace, and all wars and conflicts cease!

May all sentient beings throughout the Dharma realm dwell in joy, peace and serenity!

May all sentient beings transcend birth and death, escape the Three Realms, be freed from suffering, and attain bliss!

May all sentient beings hear the true Dharma, and uphold pure precepts to perfection! Let the precepts shine like flawless pearls, untainted by defilement!

May Mother Earth restore her magnetic field to the balance and harmony that prevailed at the beginning of the kalpa! May every karmically connected sentient being who comes across this writing share its message with their relatives and friends far and wide! May they cherish this precious human body obtained through observing the Five Precepts in past lifetimes, cultivate the Dharma earnestly, and make the most of this leisure-endowed human body to persist in upholding pure precepts, elevate the innate radiance of our self-nature, and reach the other shore of liberation without delay!

May our spiritual nature advance toward brightness! If every sentient being possesses spiritual brightness, the entire universe and nature will naturally attain equilibrium, and we will not face so many natural disasters arising from collective karma. Thus, for the sake of the entire cosmos, we must first cultivate ourselves well. Each of us is a small universe which is linked to the great universe. One contains all; all resides within one. There is no separation between self and others, and all existences are inextricably interconnected. Never delude yourself into thinking that private deeds remain unseen. Even a single idea of good or evil is instantly recorded in the ledgers of merits and demerits maintained by the netherworld authorities.

Full of compassion, all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas constantly seek ways to liberate living beings. In today's human society, morality (Dao and virtue) has declined. Though advanced technology has brought abundant material comforts to people, human minds have grown deeply corrupted. Most modern people do not believe in karmic retribution, dismissing it as an outdated idea out of step with the times. Even children are no longer as pure and good-natured as humans were at the kalpa's beginning, let alone adults. Little do they know that the root cause lies in the loss of the noble ancient traditions of Confucius and Mencius and education based on the *Four Books and Five Classics*.

Modern people live with liberal spiritual outlooks and dress revealingly. Garments sold in major shopping malls such as camisoles and tank tops are widely regarded as acceptable nowadays. Such attire would have been utterly unthinkable for women in ancient times. Stores selling adult intimate products can be seen everywhere in modern society. Newspapers at newsstands and magazine covers are almost plastered with images of women in skimpy bikinis and low-cut outfits. Children are inevitably exposed to these images every day, making it extremely difficult to keep them from going astray. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas perceive that today's human society grievously lacks education rooted in the teachings of ancient sages and worthies. They lament that once sentient beings' spiritual nature fades away, disasters will strike one after another without cease. Though there remain virtuous people who continuously share writings and messages intended to redeem the declining morality of the mortal (human) world, if sentient beings refuse to abandon evil and embrace goodness, they will inevitably fall into the hell realms upon the end of their mortal lives. There they shall endure endless varieties of torment, with no chance of liberation.

The Heavenly Emperor, out of compassion, saw that the numerous great hells were already completely overcrowded, so he had no choice but to order the continuous construction and

expansion of more new hells, especially the hells for those guilty of sexual misconduct. Many young children suffered torments in these hells of sexual misconduct, all because they were severely deprived of sound moral values and teachings on karmic retribution during their mortal lives. This was truly a profound sorrow for all human beings in the mortal world! For this reason, the Heavenly Emperor made a special supplication to the Buddha, asking him to select a suitable disciple living in the mortal world who strictly observed pure precepts. This disciple was to tour the hells in full waking awareness, then return to the mortal world to compose a book that recorded all scenes of the hells in detail to inform all living people on earth. The book is titled *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. After each trip to witness the hells, this disciple of the mortal world needed to write down accounts in simple, easy-to-understand language. Every draft needed to undergo revisions and cross-checking for factual accuracy before publication. Sometimes, to perfect a single report, Ayù (the pet name of Shangguan Yuhua) had to travel back and forth between the mortal world and the netherworld many times to confirm the authenticity of the contents. Thus, the accounts recorded in this book are entirely different from the virtuous tracts once widespread among humans: those written via planchette divination, by mediums possessed by ghosts or souls, or supernatural accounts recounted from people's dreams.

Out of compassion, the Heavenly Emperor has ordained this unprecedented mission: to entrust me, Shangguan Yuhua, to lay bare the true conditions of the hells to all mortal beings. He hopes this book will serve as a solemn warning for the world, guiding people to cultivate their minds and nurture their nature, so they will henceforth abstain from breaking precepts and committing misdeeds. This will drastically reduce the likelihood of them falling into the hell realms to endure torment once their human lives end. If people relay these genuine truths about the hells to others, awakening more worldly folk to turn away from evil and

walk the upright path, and diligently do good deeds to accumulate merits and blessings, they may be spared the retribution for the evil causes of hell they previously created. They may then be reborn in blessed lands, or change from a female to a male body. Naturally, all specific outcomes shall be definitively judged by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and the workings of karmic cause and effect.

Within every single living being lies a path leading toward radiance, a ladder reserved for living beings who truly repent to climb step by step. May all living beings understand that sowing good karma brings good fruits, while planting evil karmas invites bitter retributions. Karmic consequences follow one's every move like a shadow. It is not that there will be no reckoning—only that the time has not yet come!

Not long ago, the Buddha instructed Ayù to tour the hells and return to record written accounts, so that all people might comprehend karma and uphold the pure precepts with sincerity. I earnestly hope those who have not yet kept the precepts will diligently abide by them, and those who already observe them will strive for further progress, continuously elevating their spiritual level and realm to engage in more deeds that benefit all living beings.

Ayù is a Buddhist disciple who has taken refuge in the Three Jewels and observes the Five Precepts. I feel deeply honored that out of compassion, the Buddha has entrusted me with this mission. As stated in the *Earth Store Bodhisattva Fundamental Vows Sutra*, to enter the hell realms, one "must rely either upon divine spiritual power or karmic force". In truth, without the Buddha's grace and empowerment, I lack the sufficient merits, blessings and wisdom to shoulder this sacred undertaking. Yet I will cherish this opportunity dearly and exert my utmost efforts to fulfill this great task arranged by the Buddha out of compassion.

There is a well-known saying: "Those who propagate the Dharma are Bodhisattvas; those who protect the Dharma are

Buddhas.” All meritorious virtues ultimately originate from the Buddha. The Buddha makes countless arrangements and continually bestows blessings behind the scenes, unseen by us all. Therefore, all practitioners and cultivators must earnestly uphold the precepts to repay the kindness of the Buddha and one’s spiritual teachers.

Written with reverence by Shangguan Yuhua,
an unworthy disciple



Register of Life and Death

Per Ayù's firsthand visions, the Register of Life and Death is pale yellow. Its cover is adorned with linear ornamentation inscribed with the three Chinese characters 生死簿 , and it is bound in the traditional thread-book format.

This pale yellow tome records every fortune, misfortune, blessing and disaster that befalls souls during their mortal incarnations. Netherworld magistrates also possess a dark red Register of Life and Death, which stores exhaustive personal dossiers for souls dwelling in the nether realm. It matches the pale yellow volume exactly in binding and styling, with color as its sole distinction.



Pass to the Underworld

This official pass, titled the Netherworld Access Token, grants living mortals permission to enter and exit the netherworld and conduct sanctioned visits to the various hell realms. I have done my best to depict this token based on my direct personal visions to help readers grasp its form and function. The graphic displays both faces of this single integrated talisman. If questioned by nether officials, the bearer must present this token to confirm their identity and prove their authorized entry rights.





The Cangue and Shackles

The cangue and shackles are used by the netherworld to restrain and bind the souls of sinful yang people (mortals). The common expression “being bound by the cangue and shackles” refers exactly to them. Now, we have done our best to use computer technology to present them, and the images have already achieved a resemblance of over eighty percent. I hope this will help readers understand more.

On one of the cangues are engraved the characters “Grievous Offender” and “Avoidance by Command”. As the engraved characters suggest, the phrases “Grievous Offender” and “Avoidance by Command” indicate that the wearer is a major criminal with grave offenses and heavy karmic sins. “Avoidance by Command” means that this condemned soul is not to be approached at will. The unmarked cangue is used to detain those ordinary condemned souls.

As the saying goes: “Do not complain that Heaven has no eyes; since ancient times, no wrongdoer has ever escaped.”



Ox-Head and Horse-Face

Ox-Head and Horse-Face serve as frontline officers of the netherworld. Each day, they receive piles of mortal end-of-life warrants dispatched by the netherworld, formally named the netherworld soul-summons edict, shortened to the soul edict.

The soul edict falls into two color classifications: pale yellow and deep crimson. Pale yellow edicts are borne by nether officials from the Merit Bestowal and Transgression Judiciaries, who travel to the mortal realm to escort virtuous departed souls down to the netherworld. Only deep crimson edicts are entrusted to Ox-Head and Horse-Face. A pale yellow edict signifies the deceased mortal accumulated substantial good karma; a deep crimson edict denotes grave karmic evil deeds, dooming the spirit to undergo torment across all manner of hellish realms.

Every soul edict bears exhaustive records: the mortal's identity, place of residence, exact year, month, day, hour and second of their passing, as well as the specific karmic events that brought their earthly life to an end. Guided by the precise time and location inscribed on the edict, Ox-Head and Horse-Face directly seize the soul and escort it back to the netherworld to receive its karmic retribution.



No One Is Good Before the Platform of the Karma-Manifesting Mirror

Heaven sees all good and evil, loyalty and treachery; No one escapes the impartial law of cause and effect.

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1 / The Origin of Writing *The Inexorable Nether Laws* (Part One): Ascending to the Thirty-Three Heavens by the Buddha's Divine Power

Grateful for the Buddha's supporting empowerment, I departed riding a white lotus flower.

Amitabha! I pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate., a netherworld judicial official who aids the Yama Kings in handling judicial affairs.

I asked the Magistrate, "When Great Emperor Fengdu, the Nether Sovereign Yama King, submitted a memorial to the Heavenly Emperor proposing the compilation of *The Inexorable Nether Laws* to exhort and enlighten mortals, what instructions did the Heavenly Emperor deliver?"

The Magistrate replied: "I am bound for the heavenly realm to report official business to the Heavenly Emperor. I shall take you along to have an audience with him."

I joyfully thanked the Magistrate, and we flew toward the heavenly realm. At an altitude of roughly six thousand meters above the earth, a pure, tranquil peace grew palpable. I spotted heavenly people gliding through the air, and also saw palaces and houses that radiated light—exquisite and beautiful, unlike the dull, lusterless dwellings of the mortal world.

Presently we arrived before the gate of a grand palace. Above the gate were three large Chinese characters: "Di Shi Tian," a Chinese name for Sakra. Two imposing, majestic heavenly generals stood guard armed with weapons. They appeared to recognize us and greeted us with courteous smiles. The Magistrate

explained that we sought an audience with the Heavenly Emperor. The two generals said the Heavenly Emperor had left prior instructions that we might enter directly without further announcement. The generals stepped aside; the gates opened automatically; and we proceeded inward.

This palace was not only immense but extraordinarily solemn, shimmering radiantly. I caught sight of celestial maidens, each possessed of peerless beauty and extraordinary bearing. Even the most gorgeous Miss World from the human realm would instantly pale in comparison upon arriving here. The bodies of heavenly beings are also born through transformation. The atmosphere this place gave was utterly different from that of the hell realms. All heavenly beings dwell in ease and freedom, every one of them looking joyful and content, for no suffering exists within the heavenly realms. The garments worn by heavenly beings floated lightly in the air, bearing no trace of stitching. As the Chinese idiom puts it, “heavenly robes are seamless.” When I toured the heavenly realm, I thought the human realm was filthy beyond measure; yet when I visited the hells, I felt the human realm was far better by contrast. Hence, humans ought to keep ascending. The higher one ascends, the purer the realm becomes; the lower one sinks, the more tormenting the realm grows.

A heavenly maiden came over to lead us onward; the palace really was vast. Presently, a resplendent golden hall came into view ahead, and we stepped inside. The heavenly maiden reported to the Heavenly Emperor that a hell magistrate of the netherworld and Shangguan Yuhua, a mortal woman from the mortal world, had come to pay homage.

Seated highest at the center of the great hall was the Heavenly Emperor. His sacred appearance radiated solemn compassion. He wore an ancient Chinese imperial crown, rectangular in shape, with strands hanging down at the front and back. One could not gaze upon his form without feeling profound reverence. Soft, gentle seven-hued light emanated from the fabric of his robes.

Though seven colors intertwined, they were never harsh to the eye, layered with distinct depth and dimension. Observing him filled me with profound peace and ease. The mind light radiating from the Emperor's heart could envelop the entire heavenly realm.

The Magistrate bowed to pay homage to the Heavenly Emperor, and I knelt upon the hall floor, bowing my head before him. At that moment, the Heavenly Emperor spoke in a voice filled with compassion: "Rise, Shangguan Yuhua. You wish to ask my thoughts regarding the compilation of *The Inexorable Nether Laws* commissioned by the nether authorities, do you not?"

The hues of the Heavenly Emperor's robes shifted continuously. They had just shimmered with seven colors, yet now they transformed into white, cream, pale green and golden yellow. Seamless heavenly robes spared endless time spent cutting and sewing, and their hues could shift at will—truly inconceivable!

I said: "That is precisely my wish. This humble mortal woman seeks to inquire of Your Majesty the reason behind the writing of *The Inexorable Nether Laws*."

The Heavenly Emperor sighed and said, "Among all living beings of the human realm and the three lower realms, only a tiny fraction are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from other lands who descend to the mortal realms by their original vows to teach and transform the suffering beings karmically connected to them. All other sentient beings below the heavenly realm are my subjects. Once they fall into the human realm, their dispositions become tainted as they transmigrate through human lives. The farther they drift from the heaven realm, the fewer can return to their homeland in the heaven realm. The countless harmful thoughts and intentions emitted daily by sentient beings in the mortal world have severely damaged the dwelling environment of the heavens, and dimmed the radiance of my palaces. In recent years, human minds have undergone abrupt, drastic changes. People disregard the law of karma and take sexual misconduct as

something fashionable. This has generated an extremely vicious cloud of lust that surges straight upward to the firmament, like a sharp blade, with poisonous clouds shrouding the heavenly realm. If things continue like this, before long all human beings will fall into the hells.

"While I was pondering how to resolve this great catastrophe for humanity, Great Emperor Fengdu sent an urgent official document from the netherworld to submit a request to me for instructions. It stated that hell was already overcrowded and had suffered an extreme shortage of staff. The hells keep expanding constantly to this day. Therefore, the netherworld resolved to reveal heavenly secrets on a grand scale. It sought a suitable mortal from the human realm to tour the hells and then compose a book titled *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, to be circulated among mankind, with the goal of restoring the moral order and purifying people's minds. I then beseeched the Buddha, whose blessings and wisdom are complete and perfect, to seek a suitable cultivator among mortal beings on my behalf. This person must witness the hells in full waking consciousness, then return to the mortal world to record everything seen and heard. Therefore you must wholeheartedly shoulder this sacred task and live up to the mission I have entrusted to you.

"The original domicile of all sentient beings is the heaven realm. Your registration has now been transferred to the human realm; those who have fallen into hell have likewise had their registration transferred. Hells are like prisons confining sentient beings. Once they truly repent and reform, they will return to the heaven realm. In the title *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, "Nether" refers to the realm of the dead. The term 'laws' covers Buddhist precepts, heavenly decrees, netherworld laws and mortal legal codes. If mortal beings break these precepts and laws, they shall inevitably descend into the nether hells to endure the karmic retribution decreed by these unyielding laws. Thus, those who walk the path of goodness during their lifetime will never fall into

hell, whereas those who commit evil deeds will certainly face punishment under *the inexorable nether laws.*To evade such harsh karmic retribution, humans must practice good deeds, purify their minds and cultivate Dao. In this way, their lives will surely be elevated to the heaven realm.

“I have dispatched heavenly beings to safeguard you as you compose this precious classic, *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. May this book be printed and circulated among humanity without delay, purifying the minds of all people, so every sentient being may return to their heavenly homeland as intended.

“Should any mortal being in the world read this precious volume and reprint and distribute it widely to others, I shall send heavenly beings karmically connected to them to help them fulfill all their virtuous wishes. I hope all sentient beings can deeply grasp my intention! Shangguan Yuhua, please take and eat this fruit.”

Joyfully, I caught the fruit with both hands yet did not take a bite. I wondered what gift I could offer the Heavenly Emperor in return.

Then I heard the Heavenly Emperor ask, “Why do you not eat the fruit?”

I replied with gratitude, “I wish to carry Your Majesty’s gracious gift back to the human realm for my elderly father to enjoy.”

The Heavenly Emperor said: “Your filial piety is praiseworthy, but your father does not yet possess sufficient merit and blessings to partake of this fruit. You ought to eat this celestial fruit yourself. To complete the book *The Inexorable Nether Laws* and spread it throughout the mortal world will be the finest gift you could present to me.”

So I ate the immortal fruit with a heart full of gratitude. Fresh and juicy, the fruit delivered pure sweetness, making me feel light and at ease. I had never truly tasted such fresh, sweet fine fruit in the mortal world. Ayù’s body was immediately brimming with

energy. I must earnestly write down all that I have seen and heard after returning. I am grateful for the Heavenly Emperor's care and favor.

"*Amitabha*! Your humble subject Shangguan Yuhua bows in gratitude to the Heavenly Emperor. I am taking my leave now!"

The Magistrate could finally attend to his official duties, for I had occupied much of his time.

"Thank you, Magistrate!" I pressed my palms together and bowed to the Magistrate. Had I not been in a rush to return and write my account, I would have loved to sit and practice deep meditation amid such pure celestial surroundings. Yet time pressed on, so I departed riding a white lotus flower right away.

2 / The Origin of Writing *The Inexorable Nether Laws* (Part Two): Another Audience with Great Emperor Fengdu, the Supreme Ruler of the Netherworld

Grateful for the Buddha's empowerment, Ayù departed by white lotus flower.

Amitabha! I pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate: "Magistrate, I wish to know how the netherworld originally initiated the compilation of the classic *The Inexorable Nether Laws*."

The Magistrate said, "Some time ago, an emergency assembly was convened in our netherworld. All the Kings of the Twelve Halls and every official received an urgent proclamation—a netherworld official dispatch issued by Great Emperor Fengdu, the Nether Sovereign Yama King. Great Emperor Fengdu, the Nether Sovereign Yama King, is the supreme ruler of our netherworld. There is only one Nether Sovereign Yama King, beneath whom stand the Twelve Halls Yama Kings. In times past, there were merely ten Yama Kings governing the ten halls of hell. Now, with newly expanded regions of hell established, two additional Yama Kings have been appointed. These Yama Kings of the Twelve Halls, twelve in total, each preside over all the greater and lesser hells beneath their respective halls. And all Twelve Halls Yama Kings take orders from Great Emperor Fengdu, the Nether Sovereign Yama King.

"The urgent netherworld proclamation stated the following: Witnessing the hells grow overwhelmingly overcrowded, with new hellish realms constantly under construction and an extreme

shortage of the nether officials and staff, the Nether Sovereign Yama King can no longer bear to watch countless sentient beings from the human realm sink down into the hells. He therefore submitted a memorial to the Heavenly Emperor, petitioning that a living mortal who purely observes the precepts be dispatched to witness hellish torments. After returning to the mortal world, this mortal would author a book titled *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, the purpose of which is to purify people's minds, restore the mind-nature of deluded sentient beings, and guide them to practice good deeds and accumulate virtues so as to live out their natural lifespans peacefully and transcend to higher realms after death, avoiding a fall into hell. The one selected for this mission is none other than you, Shangguan Yuhua. You have been granted a token issued by the netherworld, permitting you free passage to and from the netherworld throughout the writing process. The netherworld has specially assigned a Magistrate to escort you, Shangguan Yuhua (known as Ayù), on your tours of the hells and answer all your questions. Whenever this Magistrate is tied up with duties and unavailable, all officials of the underworld shall render assistance to Shangguan Yuhua. The hell realms are very vast, so a full tour will require an immense amount of time, yet *The Inexorable Nether Laws* must be widely distributed among people as soon as possible. For this reason, they will select representative condemned souls and related cases for you to interview."

"The urgent netherworld proclamation mentions that you, Ayù, visit the hells in full waking consciousness, manifesting a separate body through meditative practice. The netherworld hopes that after the publication of *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, the number of mortals falling into hell each day can be greatly reduced, which will ease our overwhelming daily workload. All officials and attendants of the netherworld are extremely busy at present, yet we will set aside time to receive you and furnish all information you require when you come. The compilation of *The Inexorable*

Nether Laws was ordered by Great Emperor Fengdu, the Nether Sovereign Yama King. If you wish to learn more details, I will take you to have an audience with the Nether Sovereign Yama King, and he will answer all your questions."

"Very well! I am profoundly grateful to you, Magistrate."

We proceeded onward. The hells are truly vast, and our route differs with every visit. May all sentient beings never fall into these realms of torment. If one must set foot here, let it be out of a sacred vow to deliver sentient beings.

Along our current path, there were no cries of agony nor oppressive dread. Up ahead lay a brook spanned by a small bridge and a grove of trees, lending a serene atmosphere. The Magistrate explained that this was where the netherworld's Yama King lived, and we were heading for the meeting room where he received officials to discuss affairs. The living quarters for nether officials are quite agreeable, with amenities comparable to those enjoyed by mortal administrators. Further ahead stood a stately hall adorned in the understated elegance of antiquity. Centered above the main hall hung a horizontal plaque bearing four prominent Chinese characters meaning "Upright and Impartial". Beneath the plaque sat Great Emperor Fengdu, the Nether Sovereign Yama King. Pictures of figures in ancient dress performing good deeds hung on the walls on both sides, while several nether-world officials were seated on either side. Great Emperor Fengdu was deeply occupied, conferring with his ministers on the expansion of hell realms — he really was very busy.

At once, I knelt down and said: "This mortal woman Shangguan Yuhua is paying homage to Great Emperor Fengdu! I am thankful that you initiated the compilation of *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, allowing me to broaden my understanding, eradicate karmic obstacles and cultivate blessings. I humbly ask Your Majesty: what karmic conditions prompted the creation of this classic text?"

Great Emperor Fengdu, the Nether Sovereign Yama King replied: "In primeval ancient times, all people possessed an innate

goodness and upheld the Five Precepts and Ten Virtuous Deeds. Back then, yin and yang between heaven and earth were balanced. Rainbows shone brightly, grains grew abundantly, and peace pervaded the human world. There were no natural disasters or calamities wrought by humans. Everyone lived out their natural lifespan peacefully and returned to the heavenly realms upon passing. Yet people's root nature became increasingly tainted, and they sank lower and lower. Human habitual tendencies have arisen from lust since beginningless kalpas, as people cycle through rebirth in the six paths. As human conduct continuously degenerated, people broke the precepts and committed the ten evils. By the middle ancient era, Heaven began constructing hells to punish and reform transgressing mortals, compelling them to reflect in hell.

"The hells back then were small, and few mortals descended there. As ages passed, human minds became more corrupted, and the good innate nature held by mankind in primeval times has nearly vanished entirely. Nowadays, human minds are no longer as they once were; changes are drastic. The vapors of malicious thoughts among mortals surge straight toward the heavenly court. Most notably, the rampant energy of sexual misconduct severely disrupts the natural balancing laws of the universe, muddying the vital qi of heaven and earth to such an extent that the boundary between heaven and earth grows indistinct; yin and yang have long lost their equilibrium. Mortals dwelling in the human world rely on the balanced harmony of Earth's natural environment to live and work in peace. At the beginning of this kalpa, all people were kindhearted, observing the five precepts and ten virtuous deeds. Hence auspicious harmony filled heaven and earth. This auspicious harmony appeared when human minds resonated with nature; nature in turn responded with clear skies, abundant harvests and radiant rainbows. Today, grain yields decline on Earth; various regions face all kinds of natural and human-made disasters. Skies turn dark, and temperatures can swing drastically

within mere days—all brought about by violent fluctuations of evil thoughts in human minds. Heartless and unrighteous thoughts draw cold air into the mortal world. When people uphold brightness within their hearts, rainbows grace the human world instead.

"Frequent natural disasters in the mortal realm are already a warning sign. More catastrophes will follow in succession. No mortal technology can halt their arrival. What can save sentient beings is not advanced technology, but sincere observance of the five precepts, practicing the ten virtuous deeds, genuine repentance for past misdeeds, and cultivating the pure Way. If people continue in their present evil ways, the universe and nature possess their own ways to restore balance. Great natural and man-made catastrophes will befall the mortal world, and all mortals who persist in evil will without exception fall into the hells.

"Hell is now completely overcrowded, and our workload here has become severely overwhelming. I cannot bear to witness the mortal world sliding toward ruin amid collapsing ethics. Therefore, I have ventured to reveal profound heavenly secrets. I submitted a petition to the Heavenly Emperor to appoint a precept-abiding pure mortal, who may visit and witness all manner of torments in hell while fully conscious, then return to the mortal realm to write a book to exhort and transform humanity, urging them to abandon evil and embrace goodness, so that they can recover the radiance of their innate spiritual nature without delay.

"If mortals, after reading *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, pass it on, or reprint it free of charge and circulate it widely while purifying their own minds, all their good aspirations shall be fulfilled. The netherworld will record a great meritorious virtue in their individual Register of Life and Death. Such beings may be absolved of past karmic offenses that would condemn them to hell,

and upon the end of their lifespan, ascend to the heavenly realms sustained by this great meritorious virtue.

"Those who slander or obstruct the circulation of this virtuous text shall have grave evil karma marked down in their Register of Life and Death in the Netherworld. When their life ends, they will be cast into the Howling Hell, the Tongue-Pulling Hell, the Eye-Gouging Hell and other hells to endure torment. Even before their natural lifespan concludes, they will suffer afflictions and an untimely death. The exact punishment is determined by the specific circumstances of their slander or obstruction. Should many sentient beings accept and believe their slander, the slanderer will not only receive punishment in the aforementioned hells but also be cast into the Avīci Great Hell, where escape and rebirth become exceedingly difficult!

"Now, we are heavily occupied. You may return for today first and record what I have told you regarding the origins of this book. I hope all mortals will encourage one another, spread these words, diligently cultivate their conduct and inner nature, accumulate virtue and practice goodness."

Amitabha! I bowed in gratitude to Great Emperor Fengdu, the Nether Sovereign Yama King!

Having pressed my palms together and expressed gratitude to all magistrates and officials, I returned by white lotus flower.

3 / Attending the Tribunal in Person at the Seventh Hall

Grateful for the empowerment of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This journey to the hells has broadened my knowledge and further strengthened my resolve to uphold the precepts. Since childhood, I have experienced special spiritual perceptions. Events that are about to unfold or will take place in the future often appear to me in visions that resemble dreams yet are not mere dreams. I can clearly perceive my soul departing from my physical body; I see my own body lying on the bed, while my spirit travels forth to witness occurrences, and I retain full recollection of everything I behold. Generally speaking, such visions will later come to fruition in time, or serve as hints, so that I have already dealt with matters before the events occur.

The foresights I received in the past concerned only myself and my family. This time it is different. I am tasked to share these truths with all sentient beings, so everyone may understand how critical every thought is. As the saying goes: If you do not wish others to know of your deeds, simply refrain from committing them. Many ordinary acts unfolding around us each day are transgressions, yet few recognise them as such. Take legally wedded couples for example. Even if they have no extramarital affairs, both may violate the precept against sexual misconduct. Why? Because they fail to observe the prohibitions against intercourse at improper times, in improper places and using improper parts of the body.

Last night, I travelled to tour the hells once more in a state akin to dreaming. Upon arriving, I was enveloped by dense yin energy. Male and female souls here are engulfed in agony, letting out shrill, mournful screams. No smiles can be found here, nor any freedom. Some are bound by iron chains; others are dragged,

beaten and pierced with iron forks by ghost enforcers. The ghost enforcers and the magistrates never smile; their demeanor is solemn, and many appear ferocious. Only a few officials of the netherworld bear less menacing appearances; the other ghost attendants look menacing. Unlike the mortal world, the hells never receive sunlight. The sky is a murky grey tinged with faint red hues — an indescribable, deeply oppressive atmosphere.

I arrived at the Seventh Hall of the Netherworld just as a male soul charged with sexual misconduct stood trial. I obtained permission from the Magistrate to go in and observe the trial. Seated in the middle of this great hall was King Taishan, the presiding deity in charge of this hall. This hall contains sixteen lesser hells, all under King Taishan's administration. Yama King is the highest authority of hell. He governs all of hell, including all Twelve Halls. Each hall has its own king, and every hall-king oversees sixteen lesser hells. Next to King Taishan were two netherworld officials. One of them was a magistrate. There were also ghost enforcers carrying large broadswords and iron chains. All of them listened to the trial with stern gravity. The atmosphere was ghastly and oppressive, and a cold chill hung in the air.

I watched King Taishan, bearing a fearsome countenance, interrogate a male soul guilty of sexual misconduct committed during his mortal life. The spirit attempted to make excuses for himself. King Taishan traced a line through empty space, and the karma-revealing mirror instantly manifested. The mirror revealed scenes from the soul's youth: his acts of sexual misconduct with his wife and extramarital lovers at improper times, in improper places and through improper sexual organs, alongside his offences of viewing pornographic books and discs. Trembling all over with terror, the male soul knelt and begged for mercy, yet it was already too late. King Taishan ordered the ghost enforcers to take him away and send him to the Hell of Embracing Copper Pillars to endure punishment.

Ghost enforcers armed with great blades dragged the male soul away from the hall using iron chains to receive his punishment, and I followed to witness what would unfold. I would rather not have seen it. The souls in this hell all scream in agony, and their numbers are countless. Their mournful cries never cease; their suffering is unrelenting, without a single moment of respite. I saw the male soul from earlier walk toward the copper pillar with a joyful air. Yet the instant he embraced it, he let out a shriek of excruciating pain. I asked the Magistrate why the spirit would embrace the red-hot copper pillar. The Magistrate explained that to the spirit, the blazing copper pillar appeared as a beautiful woman, and thus he approached gladly. But upon embracing it, the pillar scorched his entire body, triggering cries of torment.

I went on to ask the Magistrate what was meant by sexual misconduct at improper times, in improper places and using improper parts of the body. Even lawfully wedded husbands and wives must avoid violating these precepts, otherwise they still commit the offence of sexual misconduct.

Improper times refer to the birth anniversaries of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the six monthly Uposatha days, and the three long annual fasting months, when intercourse should be strictly abstained from. On such days — for instance, the first, tenth, fifteenth days of each lunar month — the Four Heavenly Kings tour the mortal world to record good and evil deeds, then report to the Jade Emperor in the Heavenly Court. **Improper places:** Spouses should observe moderation regarding intimacy. Other than the marital bed, intercourse must not take place elsewhere, such as living rooms, kitchens, restrooms, open outdoors, or before Buddha statues. **Improper parts of the body:** Outside of genital intercourse, spouses must not engage in sexual acts involving other bodily parts. Transgressors will descend into the hells to endure torment. After completing their hellish punishments, they will be reborn as animals such as pigs, dogs, mandarin ducks, and snakes.

Technology is advanced in the present age, yet people must refrain from browsing pornographic websites. Viewing such sites also constitutes a precept violation, inevitably diminishing blessings, shortening lifespan and eroding one's destined fortune. Even if a person performs no physical acts, the moment his lustful thoughts arise, the attendant deities born together with the human being immediately record them. Every mortal is accompanied by two attendant deities: one records black karma, the other good karma. Naturally some will argue: If one only has one lifelong partner, this cannot count as infidelity. Yet such conduct is still wrong.

The Magistrate said: "Human beings must preserve their genuine vital essence. Excessive intercourse consumes one's righteous vital energy. When men and women engage in sexual union, malignant energy radiates forth, disrupting the righteous energy between heaven and earth." If lawfully married couples have transgressed the precepts concerning improper times, improper places and improper parts of the body, they ought to repent and reform without delay. Share this message with all sentient beings in the mortal world, so everyone may uphold purity and self-respect, observe etiquette and human ethics, and restore balance to the righteous energy permeating heaven and earth.

If one previously transgressed the prohibitions of improper times, places and means yet was coerced by one's lawful spouse, felt no pleasure from the act, repented promptly, and resolved to exhort others thereafter, such a person may be spared torment in these hells. But those who deliberately seek gratification while breaking the precepts must descend into the Hell of Embracing Copper Pillars. Once their punishment concludes, they will be reborn within the animal path, and upon returning to the human world, they shall receive a lowly female body.

Now I shall elaborate on the varying verdicts for violating the precept against sexual misconduct. First, unmarried men and

women. Single unmarried persons who remain virgins and have never engaged in sexual relations with the opposite sex commit the offence of sexual misconduct if they read pornographic books or browse pornographic websites. This diminishes their blessings, shortens their lifespans and erodes their destined fortune. Viewing such content once reduces one's lifespan by one month; continued viewing shortens it by more than a year. If one only views such material without acting upon lustful thoughts and repents in time, one's karmic offences may be lightened.

Unmarried persons who engage in premarital relations with only one partner will both suffer depleted blessings, even if they later marry one another, for they have failed to uphold proper etiquette. Furthermore, if unmarried people recklessly engage in promiscuity, constantly changing partners — with Person A today, Person B tomorrow, and Person C the day after (in the present age, many men take pride in having numerous girlfriends, while some women indulge in indiscriminate intimacy with many partners), upon death, such people will fall into this hell and endure far longer torment embracing the fiery copper pillars. Afterwards they transmigrate as animals, and when reborn among humans, they must repay their ancient karmic debts. Married persons who enter extramarital affairs receive sentences varying in severity and duration according to the harm inflicted; the minimum punishment is ten thousand years embracing the fiery copper pillars.

Rapists who plot to deprive women of their chastity, as well as women consumed by rampant lust, shall fall into this hell for twenty thousand years after death. Thereafter they enter the Howling Hell for another ten thousand years of suffering, before returning to the human realm to settle their past karmic debts. Those who commit sexual misconduct and additionally poison and slay others shall descend into this hell for forty thousand years, then return to the human realm to repay their past karmic debts.

Amitabha! If any inaccuracies appear in this record, all faults rest solely with this novice, and are unrelated to the teachings imparted by the Magistrate. I am deeply grateful for the empowerment of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, which enabled me to tour the hells and compose this writing to share with all. If any meritorious virtue arises from this work, I dedicate it to all sentient beings throughout the Dharma Realm of empty space. May they all transcend desire, uphold pure precepts, and together attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

4 / The Magistrate Declares: “Repentance after Death Comes Far Too Late!”

Grateful for the immense empowerment of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, I once again journeyed to the hells to witness and learn. The hells are perpetually steeped in suffering and gloom, permeated with negative magnetic fields. I hope no one will arrive here on account of creating evil karma; the agony is truly beyond description.

Presently I arrived at the Seventh Hall, where a male soul stood awaiting judgment. He appeared refined and gentle, and I wondered what transgression he had committed. The Magistrate sentenced him to five hundred years of torment in the Hell of Swallowing Copper Balls. It turned out that while alive, this spirit had one lawful wife and two steady partners. He was fond of sexual misconduct at improper times, in improper places and using improper parts of the body, and these three partners catered to his desires. Throughout his lifetime, he had only these three companions.

Then I heard the male soul pleading in his own defence. He asked why his lawful wife was spared five hundred years of retribution in the Hell of Embracing Copper Pillars, yet he could not escape five hundred years of punishment in the Hell of Swallowing Copper Balls. The Magistrate commanded: “Watch the recording!” In mortal life, when the male soul urged his wife to engage in sexual acts through improper sexual organs, she refused and persuaded him not to do so, explaining it violated propriety. The wife only engaged in misconduct with him at improper times and places. Furthermore, she possessed weak lustful cravings. Hence her karmic retribution was lighter; she merely suffered

diminished blessings. By refusing illicit acts through improper sexual organs and exhorting her husband to refrain from such conduct, she accrued some blessings in return.

Though the male soul did not force his legal wife into unchastity, both of his two outside lovers joined him in committing all three forms of sexual misconduct. The Magistrate said: “In consideration of your repentant heart, filial piety, loyalty to duty, and lawful conduct in public affairs, and given that your sole offenses are these three acts of sexual misconduct, you are hereby pardoned from five hundred years of torment in the Hell of Embracing Copper Pillars.” The male soul had no further words to speak. Ghost enforcers led him away to the Hell of Swallowing Copper Balls. As the wardens pushed him inside, the spirit beheld the apparition of his lover and hastened toward her. In truth, it was a giant flying bird. Its enormous beak enclosed the male soul’s genital organ and tore it clean away with one pull. The spirit screamed in overwhelming agony. The scene grew far too gory for me to endure any longer.

After stepping out of the hall, I consulted the Magistrate regarding punishments for sexual misconduct. The Magistrate instructed that one must uphold right understanding and right mindfulness, always remaining vigilant to preserve purity and self-respect. If a person harbors thoughts of sexual misconduct yet does not act upon them, their blessings shall be reduced for one week. Simply viewing pornographic publications diminishes blessings and lifespan by one week. If the thought evolves into action, blessings and lifespan are reduced by one month. A second act of sexual misconduct diminishes blessings and lifespan by two months, and the penalty increases in this progressive manner.

All men and women who engage in premarital sexual relations suffer diminished blessings and shortened lifespans. Outcomes vary for each individual, yet they may be broadly divided into three categories.

First category: It refers to those who have only one partner in life, whose partner has low sexual desire, and who later marry that partner. Provided they do not transgress the prohibitions against sexual misconduct at improper times, in improper places and using improper parts of the body, only their blessings will be depleted. Such people may eliminate karmic retribution through sincere repentance at an early time.

Second category: It refers to those who maintain one partner before and after marriage yet commit sexual acts at improper times, in improper places or using improper parts of the body, and are driven by strong lust. Such persons lose blessings and shorten their lifespans both before and after marriage. Upon death, they will endure five hundred years in the Hell of Embracing Copper Pillars and another five hundred years in the Hell of Swallowing Copper Balls. If they practise genuine repentance while alive, they will possess greater power to dissolve their karma. Should they furthermore earnestly exhort others to refrain from sexual misconduct, they may offset their faults with meritorious deeds and possibly escape hellish retribution.

Third category: It refers to those who recklessly engage in sexual misconduct before and after marriage, consumed by overwhelming lust and living a dissipated life of indulgence. They will inevitably suffer diminished blessings and shortened lifespans in this lifetime. After death, they are sent to hells including the Hell of Embracing Copper Pillars, the Hell of Iron Bed and the Hell of Swallowing Copper Balls, enduring no less than ten thousand years of torment in each hell. The exact suffering is determined according to individual circumstances. Once their hellish punishment concludes, they are reborn into the animal path. Some return as mandarin ducks, others as dogs, snakes and other creatures.

At present, the largest group undergoing retribution in the hells belongs to this third category, and the hells have expanded vastly compared with before. Many people committing sexual

misconduct in the mortal world fall into this group and will come to the hells for retribution in the future.

The Magistrate continued: “Husbands and wives must strictly refrain from intercourse during the wife’s menstrual period. Intercourse is also forbidden during pregnancy and lactation; otherwise their blessings will be depleted. Moreover, intercourse during menstruation attracts all kinds of ghosts that devour blood and vital essence, feeding on the couple involved. Every act of illicit sexual union draws essence-devouring ghosts that drain one’s qi, leading to bodily illness and persistent misfortune.”

The Magistrate also revealed that women who wear overly revealing clothing in summer lose blessings for one week, for such attire arouses lustful thoughts in the opposite sex. Hearing the Magistrate’s words, I realized how critical the arising of every single thought and every idea is. It turned out that ghosts and spirits in the unseen realm watch, supervise and record every one of our deeds.

I was deeply grateful to the Magistrate for this vital information and the heavenly secrets disclosed. I took my leave of the Magistrate there. May all sentient beings cultivate pure brahmacarya and escape the sufferings of the hells.

5 / Terrible Retribution in the Great Hell for Masturbation: The Magistrate Fully Reveals Heavenly Secrets!

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas deliver all sentient beings without cease, just as the ocean cannot exist apart from its waves; thought after thought continues unbroken, and wave follows wave without interruption. May all sentient beings under heaven reflect deeply upon this, abide by their duties, observe the Five Precepts to preserve their human rebirth, and maintain purity and self-respect. I also aspire to learn the boundless compassion of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, to toil without rest and to serve countless sentient beings. Yesterday, by the power of the Buddha, I journeyed down to the hells once more.

Bowing in homage, grateful for the Buddha's empowerment, as soon as I recited the Buddha's name, I arrived at the suffering hell. Without the Buddha's protection and encircling radiance, I would be utterly exhausted. The negative magnetic field of the hells surges forth ceaselessly like overwhelming tidal waves. If, in the human world shrouded in gloom, rain fell continuously for seven days, and one caught a cold, many would already cry out how bitter life is. Imagine enduring constant drizzle, illness, dizziness and weariness yet still having to work. In truth, the sufferings of hell are at least hundreds and thousands of times more severe than any mortal agony, and torment in the hells never pauses. Even now, screams and agonized moans drift from the hells. Let us follow the sounds and behold what unfolds!

Wow! Many male souls stand naked, entwined by soft-looking two-headed serpents emitting fiery-red flames. To these male souls, the serpents appear as beautiful women caressing them. Yet

the instant the two-headed serpents touch their genitals, they bite them clean off. The male souls howl in excruciating pain and fall unconscious. The two-headed serpents exhale a breath, and the souls instantly revive; their mangled genitals are suddenly restored intact. Then the serpents flare their fiery-red radiance once again, repeating this cycle of torment. I could bear to watch no longer, my heart heavy with sorrow.

Countless male souls endure this horrifying torment here. I approached the nether magistrate and asked what karmic offence brought such retribution upon them. The Magistrate explained: “This is one of the hellish karmic fruits for those who indulged in masturbation during mortal life — the retribution of the Two-Headed Fire Serpents.” They must endure this torment for ten thousand years measured by hell time. This is merely one of the evil retributions for ordinary practitioners of masturbation.

There exists another form of hellish retribution for masturbation that lasts twenty thousand years. Those who crave sensory stimulation in life, using ice, warm water, chilies, lubricants, personal artifacts or other means to masturbate, or even to teach others to commit such sexual misconduct, will fall into the Hell of Five Layers of Ice and Fire after death.

I asked why the punishment for masturbation is so severe, with even casual offenders facing ten thousand years of torment.

The Magistrate replied that masturbation gravely harms the body and corrupts virtue, depleting the human body’s three treasures: essence, vital energy, and spirit. It is also a profound act of unfilial conduct toward one’s parents, akin to suicide. Though no other person is harmed, taking one’s own life is still taking a life, hence the heavy sentence. Those who are fond of masturbation repeat the act with high frequency. The first instance of masturbation in mortal life reduces one’s blessings and lifespan by half a month; the second offense deducts a full month of blessings and lifespan. Upon death, such living beings are cast into the hells to endure retribution. If they can engage in

sincere, profound repentance while alive, they may avoid torment in the hells after death, yet this is judged individually according to each person's circumstances.

The Magistrate asked if I wished to tour the Hell of Five Layers of Ice and Fire. I thought it would be worthwhile to see it.

The scenes here were far crueler than those witnessed in the Hell of Two-Headed Fire Serpents. This place was filled with countless torture implements. These instruments were translucent, nearly white, sharply tapered and piercing. They appeared unbearably icy and razor-sharp. When they touch the male souls, their genitals are instantly frozen and shattered. Yet immediately after being destroyed, the genitals regenerate once again.

After enduring the ice torture, the condemned souls immediately undergo unceasing retribution known as the crashing volcanic mound. This punishment awaits those who use warm water, chilies and other substances to heighten stimulation while practicing masturbation and sexual misconduct. A fiery red torture implement shaped like a small hill hurtles toward the male souls. Fitted as if tailor-made, it bears a clasp that presses upon their genitals and sears them off with blazing heat. Agonized screams, moans and cries of agony fill every corner of the hell. Driven by karmic force, the souls revive and their bodies heal, only to suffer the torment repeatedly in endless cycles. The sight was unbearably harrowing and pitiful.

Witnessing this hell tonight churned my stomach. Witnessing this hell tonight churned my stomach. The Magistrate told me the hell had been newly built, yet it has already become insufficient; more still needs to be built. Countless mortals indulge in masturbation, and they will fall here to receive retribution once their lives end.

I also saw numerous Beauty Hells still under construction, reserved for those who operate beauty salons offering breast augmentation, vaginal tightening surgeries and similar

procedures for women. Many unscrupulous beauty companies and medical centres deliberately fuel women's lust and tempt them into sexual misconduct. Such beings lose blessings and shorten their lifespans while alive. Upon death, they enter these hells to endure punishment for ten thousand years.

The Magistrate sensed my unspoken questions; we communicated through thought transference. I wished to ask why sexual intercourse in improper locations constitutes a precept violation, and the Magistrate showed me a vision.

It turns out that outdoors, in restrooms, or on thunder-riven stormy nights, hordes of ghosts, mei, sprites and elves gather to draw the vital essence from those given to sexual misconduct, or seize the moment of their seminal emission to possess and usurp their bodies. Engaging in sexual acts in improper places harms one's own body and disrupts the righteous energetic field of nature, bringing countless harms with no benefits whatsoever. Thus those who commit such acts must endure the suffering retribution they have created.

Before I departed, the Magistrate instructed me: "You have come here relying on the Buddha's power, and this visit has also received approval from the sovereign above and the Yama Kings. I have been ordered to reveal the true conditions of the hells — an unprecedented disclosure of profound heavenly secrets. I hope you return to the human world and pass on this warning to all people. Do not commit sexual misconduct that ruins ethics and morality, for you forge your own hells. Such transgressions also vastly increase our workload in the hells and fuel natural disasters and man-made calamities in the human world. Look at my terrifying appearance. I hope people never have to meet me after death; they would be very fortunate."

"Lust stands foremost among all evils." I took my leave of the Magistrate and thanked him for his teachings. Until we meet again.

6 / The Karmic Retribution of One Hundred Thousand Years in the Great Hell for Clients of Prostitutes

Grateful to the Buddha for granting me passage to ride upon a white lotus flower. Something felt different about the hell realms today. Had I taken a wrong turn? Usually these realms are wrapped in a somber, oppressive aura, yet a powerful golden radiance filled the air — the soothing light of the Buddha. I lifted my gaze and saw that it was the Great Vow Earth Store Bodhisattva. Tears welled up in my eyes, and I immediately prostrated fully before him.

Earth Store Bodhisattva instructed me to cherish my precious human body and fulfill this meaningful mission. I must earnestly spread righteous teachings, reveal the suffering within the hells, and upon returning, exhort all living beings in the human world to turn away from evil and return to righteousness, and to abandon vice and embrace goodness. I replied joyfully to the Bodhisattva that I would do everything in my power to follow these instructions.

I first pressed my palms together and bowed to the Magistrate. “Magistrate, *today*I wish to inquire about the karmic retribution for clients of prostitutes, prostitutes, and procurers.”

The Magistrate explained that clients of prostitutes fall into two categories.

The first category: Those unable to restrain physical desire, whose spouses cannot satisfy them. They regularly visit the same prostitute for sexual relations. Each such act committed while alive diminishes one month of blessings and lifespan. After death, they are sent to the corresponding hells for sexual misconduct to

receive punishment. Sentences vary case by case, with most lasting eight hundred years.

The second category: Those consumed by intense desire, who regularly engage with prostitutes for sexual misconduct. They waste and do not treasure their human life, living in indulgence and intoxication. They also use aids to pursue physical sensory stimulation. Each transgression committed in life reduces blessings and lifespan by one and a half months. After death, they endure one hundred thousand years of torment in the hells for sexual misconduct. Once this sentence concludes, they will be reborn as lowly animals for one thousand years. Even if they regain a human form afterward, they will suffer the retribution of muddled mental clarity.

As for prostitutes, their karmic retribution falls into three categories.

The first category: Those fully controlled by others and forced into sex work, with no means of escape. They feel no pleasure during sexual acts. If they later gain freedom, sincerely repent their karmic burdens and never repeat such conduct, they may avoid punishment in the hells.

The second category: Those who engage in sex work for money. Each act in life diminishes one month of blessings and lifespan. After death, they endure eighty thousand years of torment in the hells for sexual misconduct. Upon completing this sentence, they are reborn as animals for eight hundred years. Even if they regain human form afterward, they face a fate of lowly station as a retribution.

The third category of prostitutes, like the second type of clients, is driven by overwhelming desire. They squander their human existence in indulgence and employ aids to seek physical stimulation. Each act committed in life reduces blessings and lifespan by two months. After death, they endure one hundred and fifty thousand years of torment in the hells for sexual misconduct. Once this punishment ends, they will be reborn as

lowly animals for two thousand years, and upon returning to the human form, suffer the fate of humble status.

There are two categories of procurers.

The first type takes up this trade temporarily for money. If they awaken to the truth, quit the trade permanently afterward, and engage in sincere and profound repentance, their karmic punishment in hell may be mitigated. Still, each act they commit while alive shortens their blessings and lifespan by one and a half months. After their mortal life ends, they serve one hundred thousand years of punishment in the Rolling Blaze Hell.

The second type harbors malicious intentions. They control prostitutes, are consumed by rampant personal desire, act out of pure selfishness, and even scheme to frame others. Their blessings and lifespan are depleted throughout their lifetime. Posthumously, they are confined to the Rolling Blaze Hell and cannot be released until every prostitute they victimized has been reborn into human bodies. Following their hellish sentence, they transmigrate into the animal realm to receive karmic retribution. Once their punishment in the animal realm concludes, they will be reborn into lowly, marginalized human lives.

“Oh, Magistrate, the karmic penalty for procurers is extremely severe. After hearing your explanation, my heart aches with sorrow, and I feel deep sympathy for beings in this trade.”

The Magistrate replied: “This line of work gravely corrupts social mores, undermines morality, etiquette and interpersonal ethics, and severely impairs people’s good original nature. For these reasons, the netherworld sovereigns impose harsh penalties on those who commit such misdeeds. From what I know, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas view these beings with compassion. They manifest in human form within this circle to guide those with good roots to turn away from wrongdoing and embrace goodness.”

We concluded today’s visit. Thank you, Magistrate. *Amitabha*! I departed for home by white lotus flower.

I felt truly blessed to have encountered the Great Vow Earth Store Bodhisattva within the hell realms today. The Bodhisattva was surrounded by golden light and also bestowed blessings upon me. The magnitude of the Bodhisattva's vows is truly inconceivable.

When I returned to the human world, I was utterly exhausted. Every journey into the hells drains massive amounts of my original spirit and vital energy. Upon my return, I have to recite mantras promptly to replenish what has been lost.

I earnestly implore readers not to dismiss these accounts as mere fiction, so as not to disappoint Earth Store Bodhisattva's earnest intentions. I offered my gratitude to everyone once more. Namo Great Vow Earth Store Bodhisattva Mahasattva!

7 / An On-site Account of the Hells That Punish Incest: the Overturning Wheel Ice Firmament Hell and Blossom Sword Forest Hell

I prostrated before Earth Store Bodhisattva! I rejoiced greatly to have received the benefits of the Dharma once more!

Earth Store Bodhisattva expounded the Five Precepts to Ayù. Observing the Five Precepts forms the foundation of being human, allows people to retain the human body, and prevents them from falling into the evil realms. Observing the Five Precepts may seem straightforward, yet many beings transgress them unawares. We often hear people around us say: “I have never committed murder or arson, nor have I harmed others; I am merely an ordinary person.” In truth, murder and arson are grave physical transgressions that inevitably lead to hellish retribution. Now let us listen to the compassionate teachings of Earth Store Bodhisattva concerning the Five Precepts. If any inaccuracies appear in my recounting, they stem solely from my own shortcomings.

Ayù briefly restates the Bodhisattva’s instruction as follows:

1. Abstain from killing

It is forbidden to deprive any sentient being of life. Consuming pure vegetarian food forms the foundation for observing this precept. What does “pure” mean? One must strictly uphold the teachings laid out in the Shurangama Sutra. Do not ingest, consume or employ any substances derived from sentient beings. That is to say, no food connected with animals may be taken. For instance, dairy milk, butter, eggs, honey and all other animal-related products must be avoided. Many cosmetics contain animal derivatives and should likewise not be used. When people fall ill

and take medicine, especially traditional Chinese medicines, many medicines contain animal components. Therefore one must exercise great caution.

2. Abstain from stealing

Taking others' belongings without permission and claiming them as your own counts as theft. Common workplace practices such as taking office stationery for personal use or bringing it home, making personal calls, charging personal cell phones, and using office copiers and fax machines for private paperwork without company approval are all violations of the precept against stealing.

3. Abstain from sexual misconduct

This prohibits all sexual relations outside marriage. Engaging in sexual intercourse at improper times, in improper places, using improper parts of the body, viewing pornographic media, and using devices for sexual gratification all violate this precept.

4. Abstain from false speech

Speak truthfully and never deceive others. Admit what exists, and do not fabricate what does not exist. Deliberate deception constitutes a grave violation of this precept. Try to avoid expedient false speech. Frequent use of such speech harms one's consciousness, and bad habits easily become ingrained.

5. Abstain from intoxicants

Refrain from alcohol and narcotics. No products containing alcohol may be consumed. Fermented bean curd, for example, usually contains alcohol and must therefore be avoided. Even if vendors claim only a tiny amount is used, any presence of alcohol still counts as an intoxicant. An exception is made only when alcohol is required in medicine to save a life. Many cosmetics also contain alcohol; it is best not to use them.

After respectfully listening to Earth Store Bodhisattva's teachings, Ayù proceeded to meet the Magistrate.

"Magistrate, *Amitabha*! Today I wish to inquire about the karmic retribution for incest."

The Magistrate said: “Incest is conduct that corrupts morality, debases social customs and disrupts the righteous ethical order of human relations. The netherworld will punish such beings severely. Every act of incestuous sexual misconduct committed during mortal life reduces one’s blessings and longevity by two and a half months. After death, such beings fall into the hells for sexual misconduct to endure torment: five hundred years in the Hell of Overturning Wheels, five hundred years in the Hell of Embracing Copper Pillars, five hundred years in the Hell of Iron Bed, five hundred years in the Hell of Rolling Blaze, and five hundred years in the Hell of Blossom Sword Forest. These are standard sentences for ordinary incest offences; the final punishment will be determined according to the full circumstances of each case.”

In an instant, by white lotus flower, I arrived at the Hell of Overturning Wheels. More male souls than female souls were detained here.

All condemned souls imprisoned here for incest engaged in sexual misconduct with opposite-sex relatives of the same generation within their bloodline. For men, this includes relations with elder brothers’ wives, younger brothers’ wives, elder sisters, younger sisters, or married female relatives of the same generation from their spouse’s household. For women, transgressions involve elder sisters’ husbands, younger sisters’ husbands, elder brothers, younger brothers, or married male relatives of the same generation from their husband’s household.

The Overturning Wheel Ice Firmament Hell features an enormous rotating wheel. Encircling it stand frigid ice walls, and overhead lies an ice slab resembling a mirror — we may call it the ice mirror. The ice mirror differs from the ice forming the surrounding walls; it possesses transparency and reflective properties, functioning just like a mirror to reveal all that transpires within the wheel. Countless shards of transparent ice

continuously fly out from the mirror and strike the condemned souls enduring torment on the revolving wheel.

At that moment, I watched a naked male soul walk toward the giant wheel. The wheel drew him in and trapped him inside as it spun. Ice shards shot forth from the ice mirror to pelt his body. Every impact sliced open his flesh, severing his hands and feet. Overwhelmed by agony, the condemned soul struggled desperately to escape. Yet even if he managed to stumble out of the wheel with his wounded body, the ghost enforcers waiting outside would spear him with forks and hurl him back inside. The scene was unspeakably horrific. *Amitabha*!

Then the Magistrate instructed me to visit the adjacent Blossom Sword Forest Hell. The condemned souls imprisoned here committed sexual misconduct with their direct lineal relatives during their mortal lives, either voluntarily or under coercion. Those who were forced and felt no lustful delight at the time may escape this torment through sincere repentance. However, anyone who experienced sensual gratification must receive retribution. Men who engage in sexual misconduct with daughters, granddaughters, mothers-in-law, grandmothers, or female direct relatives on their wife's side, and women who commit such acts with fathers, grandsons, grandfathers, fathers-in-law, or male direct relatives on their husband's side, will endure punishment within this hell. This realm is filled with countless blossoms that appear beautiful at first glance, yet they conceal deadly mechanisms. The blooms shift colors and look deeply alluring.

I saw a naked male spirit, overcome by lust, reaching out to grasp one flower. The blossom swiftly transformed and coiled around his body. As it slowly wound downward toward his genitals, it severed them cleanly, splattering blood everywhere amid mangled flesh. Afterwards, the flower shattered into countless rigid petal fragments that pummeled the condemned soul until he lost consciousness. Once he fainted, the ghost

enforcers doused his face with frigid icy liquid to rouse him, and the cycle of torment repeated endlessly again and again. If they had known what awaited them, why would they ever have committed incest?

The Magistrate said: “Incestuous misconduct in the mortal world cannot be tolerated by heaven and earth. Those who commit incest are burdened with grave evil karma and will inevitably receive heavy, unforgiving punishment to demonstrate the impartiality of the nether laws.

We shall conclude our visit for today. You may return another time.”

“Thank you for your guidance!” With these words, I took my leave of the Magistrate.

8 / A Youth's Addiction to Pornographic Websites Exhausts His Blessings and Lifespan: He Dies in His Twenties

Grateful to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, I set forth upon a white lotus flower.

"Magistrate, *Namo Amitabha*!" I joined my palms and paid homage to the Magistrate.

Today the Magistrate showed me around the Electric Light Eyes Hell, one of the hells for sexual misconduct. Souls punished here are those who indulged in pornographic books or websites during their lifetimes and are sent here to receive karmic retribution after their mortal lives end. Sentences in this hell are determined by the individual's age and how frequently they view such content. The minimum punishment term is fifty years. Younger individuals who fall deep into this obsession face much harsher sentences.

Most people, after browsing pornographic websites, go on to commit other sexual misconduct, such as masturbation, inappropriate sexual behavior at improper times or places, and involving improper bodily parts or sexual aids. Viewing pornographic materials severely corrupts one's wholesome inherent nature. This damage hits pure, youthful children the hardest. Adults ought not to view such content, let alone underage minors.

Many teenagers in the human world nowadays browse pornographic websites on computers. Anyone who indulges in lust will inevitably impair the wholesome development of their body, mind and spirit. Humans live guided by thinking and intention. Thinking and intention drive personal conduct;

personal conduct generates good and evil karmas; good and evil karmas shape destiny; destiny produces karmic force; and karmic force attracts all manner of retribution.

Regular exposure to pornographic content clouds one's mind and impairs sound judgment, with far-reaching negative impacts on children in particular. It robs them of valuable opportunities for personal growth and self-improvement. As the old saying goes, lust is a blade hanging overhead. Countless renowned figures and warriors throughout history, both at home and abroad, have fallen victim to lust.

The Magistrate said: "Every time a person views pornographic books or websites, their blessings and lifespan are reduced. Committing further sexual misconduct afterwards will continue to deplete blessings and lifespan, amounting to slow suicide.

"Technology is advanced in the human world today; even young children have access to computers, and many of them browse pornographic websites. Some parents are unaware of this situation. Lacking computer literacy themselves, they let their children learn to use computers unsupervised. Burdened by heavy workloads, they have little spare time to attend to their children's upbringing. Wealthier families may hire caretakers, who often fail to provide proper supervision. Such parents will also lose their blessings. Ignorance does not absolve them of responsibility. To raise a child without providing proper education is the fault of the father. Parents must actively guide their children toward healthy growth. Some parents know what is happening yet choose not to intervene. They even dismiss such behavior as normal sex education and allow their children to view obscene material. A few claim that times have changed and society is more open, arguing that sex education for young children is offered in schools. This is a grave misunderstanding and view. The Netherworld hopes that after you witness the true conditions of the hells, Ayù, you will return to the human world and urge all living beings to abandon harmful habits and reform their ways.

Cherish the decades of life in the human world, and dedicate yourself to actions that benefit society and human minds. Do not engage in deeds that harm both others and yourself. Otherwise, once your next breath fails to come, you will meet me after death!"

Screams of suffering echoed in the distance. These cries came from beings enduring brutal torture within the Electric Light Eyes Hell. This hell is equipped with many large mechanical torture devices shaped like computers, one for each spirit. Content appears on the screens. It would be better if they never looked, for the moment they gaze, they cry out in agony.

I saw a young male soul who appeared to be in his twenties. Red electrically charged hooks extended from his computer machine, latching onto his eyes and tearing his eyeballs out. Blood pooled across the ground, and the spirit was overwhelmed with agony and despair. This is the karmic retribution for watching pornographic films, images and novels online.

The Magistrate explained that this young man began viewing pornographic websites from childhood and also practiced masturbation. His frequent misdeeds quickly exhausted all his life blessings, leading to his descent into this hell. His parents still grieve deeply over losing their beloved son in the human world.

Nearby, another condemned soul sat at a table reading pornographic books. His karmic punishment was equally as severe as the eye-hooking retribution mentioned earlier, yet the fruition of this suffering came somewhat more slowly. I asked the Magistrate why the timing of punishment differs. He replied: "When people view pornography on computers, they often consume vast quantities over extended periods. In contrast, those who read pornographic books, magazines and novels are limited to a smaller amount of material. If a person viewed only a small amount of such material while alive, yet later awakened to the truth, repented sincerely and never repeated these acts, and further shared these persuasive teachings to dissuade others from viewing pornographic websites, videos and publications; if they

even spent their own funds to acquire and destroy obscene materials to atone for past wrongs, they might avoid this hellish retribution."

The Magistrate spoke sternly: "Most beings who serve their punishment in the Electric Light Eyes Hell must continue receiving torment in other hells for sexual misconduct. Those guilty of masturbation, and improper sexual behavior at improper times, in improper places or through improper sexual organs, will be sent to the Iron Ball Swallowing Hell, Molten Pillar Embrace Hell, Rolling Blaze Hell and various other hells for such transgressions after death." That was all for today.

I took my leave of the Magistrate. I pressed my palms together, bowed to the Magistrate and thanked him, and returned by white lotus flower.

Pornographic websites and videos bring immense harm to humanity. The thick smell of blood permeating these great hells was almost unbearable for me. Witnessing countless horrific, bloody scenes: condemned souls beheaded, hands severed, flesh cut and feet sliced, screaming in agony, I required significant emotional adjustment before I could regain my peace after returning home.

9 / The Hell of Electric Eyes and Iron Balls — The Brutal Punishment for Those Who Commit Masturbation

Grateful to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas! I set forth riding upon a white lotus flower.

"Magistrate, *Namo Amitabha*!" I joined my palms and paid homage to the Magistrate.

Today, the Magistrate led me through the Hell of Electric Eyes and Iron Balls, one of the hells reserved for sexual misconduct. Souls who, in their earthly existence, gave themselves over to pornographic websites, images and printed materials, and who masturbated while viewing such content before their computers, are dispatched here to endure karmic retribution upon death. Their term of torment lasts for eight hundred years. Following this period, the magistrates assess shifts in their spiritual consciousness to determine whether further suffering within this hell is required.

As related before, every time one views pornographic material, one's blessings and lifespan are reduced by one month. The very first viewing diminishes blessings and longevity by half a month; every subsequent instance incurs a loss of one month's blessings and lifespan. If one frequently views such material coupled with masturbation, one's lifetime blessings will quickly be exhausted.

This hell sits adjacent to the Electric Light Eyes Hell, yet the sufferings here are tens of millions of times harsher. Almost all the condemned souls imprisoned here are teenagers. It is heartbreaking to see that they are all so young. When I was at their age, I was just an ordinary school student, ignorant of these things. Why do they forsake their studies only to end up suffering torment in hell? The sight chills my heart to the core. Young boys must

preserve their purity. The torments of hell are unspeakably bitter; do not ever come here. Cherish your precious human life, study diligently and cultivate yourselves while dwelling in the mortal world.

I spotted the spirit of a male middle school student who looked strangely familiar. Where had I seen him? It came to me: roughly half a year ago, I saw his portrait at a funeral parlour. I was dealing with my relative's funeral back then, and his mourning hall was right next to ours. Our mourning hall was packed with relatives and kids, and we felt warm and bustling. In contrast, his was deserted, with only his parents and two or three other family members around. My relatives were discussing this poor young boy, wondering what had happened to him, and how heartbroken his parents—especially his mother—were. I recited *Amitabha* several times in front of his portrait to dedicate merits to him. I never expected to encounter his soul in hell. Human life is truly fleeting and unpredictable.

As the Magistrate told me, the boy was his parents' only child. When he was alive, he became addicted to browsing pornographic websites and publications, developed the habit of masturbation and also used self-made devices for sexual gratification. He began masturbating at the age of six, and suffered severe vitality depletion by the age of ten. His mother sought treatment from many renowned physicians for him, and he took numerous herbal medicines. Yet he walked like an elderly man and needed a cane. He failed to cherish his life and health; he continued to masturbate even while receiving treatment. As a result, all his blessings and longevity were exhausted by the age of twelve, and he was sent to the Hell of Electric Eyes and Iron Balls to endure punishment for 800 years.

Beside the boy, I saw a computer-shaped torture instrument, and fire serpents coiled around his body. Red glowing hooks extended from the computer to gouge out his eyes, sending blood splashing everywhere. Then the fire serpents wound themselves

around him. At first they seemed to brush against his genitals, but upon contact, the serpents bit them off, leaving pools of blood on the ground. Before the boy could comprehend what was happening, two ferocious giant wolves lunged at him and tore his hands apart. The scene was utterly horrific. This is torment beyond torment, unbearable suffering.

I asked the Magistrate, “Why must he endure multiple punishments simultaneously? Why not let his eyes heal before he suffers torment from the fire serpents and wolves?”

The Magistrate replied: “These punishments cannot be separated into stages. While alive, he viewed content on a computer and immediately engaged in masturbation beside it. Afterwards, he again committed sexual misconduct using self-made lewd devices. That was why he arrived swiftly in the hells to receive retribution. Once he finishes serving his sentence in this hell, he will be transferred to the Howling Hell to undergo further punishment. His habitual masturbation prematurely exhausted all his blessings, bringing immense grief to his parents. They endured the sorrow of burying their child in their old age, making him an unfilial son. For this reason, he suffers such torment. Many young people in the human world today disregard rites and righteousness. They talk back to their parents, insult them, and in extreme cases resort to violence. Their conduct is worse than some lowly animals. Those who are profoundly unfilial under heaven must come here after death to receive punishment, refining their consciousness and purifying their original spirit until they truly repent and reform from the bottom of their hearts.

“We shall end here for today. I still have official duties to attend to. You may return another day.”

I bowed to take leave of the Magistrate. “Thank you, Magistrate.”

10 / Snatching the Three Souls Before Mortal Life Ends!!!

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I set forth riding upon a white lotus flower.

“Amitabha!”I, Ayù, pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate.

Today the Magistrate led me to visit the Rod and Whip Hell, one of the hells for sexual misconduct. What exactly is the Rod and Whip Hell? It is meant for beings still living in the human world with unexpired mortal lifespans who commit sexual misconduct. The nether wardens seize a portion of their consciousness and drag them down to the hells for punishment. Humans possess three souls and seven pòs; the nether wardens seize these condemned souls’ three souls to endure torture in hell. Mortals may experience dizziness, headaches, heavy drowsiness and mental fog. Some feel they are being beaten amid haziness, yet most dismiss it as a nightmare. Severe cases bring on fevers that confine them to bed. After their punishment concludes and they return to the mortal world, some suffer excruciating pain that penetrates deep into their bones.

The Rod and Whip Hell is utterly enormous, stretching boundlessly like an ocean in the human world with no visible horizon. It is the largest hell I have visited so far. There are many people here from different places: China, Britain, the United States, France, Japan, Thailand, India, Africa, Pakistan and many others. Tragically, innumerable teenagers and even young children are also undergoing torment within this hell.

I asked the Magistrate why there were so many inhabitants, remarking that the scale of this hell was terrifying.

The Magistrate explained: “Advancements in technology have led humanity to invent computers, alongside a staggering number

of pornographic websites that poison and corrupt youths and children. They engage in sexual misconduct and plant the karmic seeds leading to the hells. The population of beings accumulating such unwholesome karma keeps soaring. For this reason, the Buddha specifically tasked you with touring the hells. Upon your return, you must urge mortals in the human world to uphold the five constants and eight virtues. Young people in particular must not dismiss these teachings as outdated. They must preserve their purity, reform their misdeeds and abandon evil to embrace goodness. Otherwise, they cannot escape the cruel torments of the hells in the future, when remorse will be too late."

At that moment, I watched the condemned souls in the Rod and Whip Hell being flogged relentlessly by the nether wardens. The nether wardens struck unceasingly with whips and rods, drawing continuous screams of agony that echoed everywhere. These beatings are intended to prompt condemned souls to reflect on their transgressions. A small number of the condemned souls mend their ways once they return to their mortal bodies and regain consciousness, yet sadly, the vast majority relapse into their old vices after going back.

Ayù wished to consult the Magistrate: "How can I convince people in the human world that the accounts in *The Inexorable Nether Laws* depict genuine, present-day conditions within the hells?" Many might dismiss my testimony as mere imagination or fiction, like a novel, making belief difficult.

The Magistrate replied: "The karmic law of cause and effect governs all unseen workings. What cannot be seen is not therefore illusory or non-existent. None of us witnessed our own birth by our mothers, yet it is an unshakable truth. That which is invisible does not mean it is non-existent. Divine spirits are three feet above our heads. Within this vast world lie countless phenomena invisible to us, yet they are intimately connected with our daily lives. It is simply that we fail to perceive the presence of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, ghosts and spirits. Each person possesses different

blessings and karmic affinities; hence their experiences and perceptions differ. The karmic retribution for good and evil deeds follows one like a shadow. Retribution is never absent; it merely awaits its appointed time. As the saying goes, the net of heaven is vast; though its meshes are wide, nothing slips through. The Buddha selected you and arranged for you to visit the great hells and observe their actual conditions. You are a precept-upholding Buddhist disciple qualified to bear this mission. Diligently and earnestly complete this virtuous work that brings benefit to all beings."

"Thank you for your encouragement, Magistrate. Ayù will do all within her power to accomplish this sacred task."

At this moment, I saw several netherworld officials walking toward the Rod and Whip Hell. Then I realized that the Nether Sovereign Yama King had arrived. I pressed my palms together and paid homage to him. It turned out that the Netherworld planned to expand the Rod and Whip Hell, and Yama King had come for an on-site inspection. He was paying close attention to the widespread social issue of adolescents committing sexual misconduct in the human world. He found that this problem was no longer confined to the human realm alone; the Netherworld was also directly affected, necessitating further construction and expansion of the Rod and Whip Hell. Surprised, I asked, "This hell is already boundlessly vast. Does it still need to be expanded further?"

Yama King replied, "More and more young people in the human world are falling into sexual misconduct. They view pornographic websites, videos, publications, and engage in self-indulgence. Their lifespans have not yet run out, yet these behaviors damage their virtue and physical health, so stern punishment is imperative. Since the laws of the human world do not address these serious transgressions, I must expand the hells and detain their living souls to settle their karmic debts. We have been continuously enlarging this hell over the years amid a

growing workload. Even now, the Rod and Whip Hell remains far too small to accommodate the countless sinful souls pouring in each day. I declare to you: those who abide by secular laws, observe the Buddha's precepts, and perform great good deeds cannot be apprehended by the Netherworld. Anyone who has committed any transgression against the precepts or laws cannot escape my records of life and death, good and evil. One may evade the laws of the human world, but the immutable Laws of the Netherworld are inescapable. Every cause sown shall inevitably bring forth its corresponding retribution. No matter how far you can flee, even to the remotest corners of the earth, the nether wardens will track you down and bring you to justice if you have transgressed against precepts or committed offenses. Ayù, you must faithfully carry out this mission of conveying our words. The Netherworld shows extraordinary leniency this time, revealing profound heavenly secrets to let humankind know the truth of the hells. Our hope is that deluded beings may turn back from their errors, practise goodness and accumulate virtues. In this way, great catastrophes arising from grave evil karma in the human world may be mitigated, sparing countless living beings from suffering. When you return, exhort all people to uphold the five constants and eight virtues, obey national laws, be filial to parents, respect teachers, maintain integrity and observe propriety. Do not continue creating causes that lead to retribution in hell. That is all. I have official duties to attend to; you may return to the human world now."

Gratitude to the Yama King! Gratitude to the Magistrate! *Amitabha*!

11 / The Magistrate Replied Gravely: “Our Nether King Has Noticed that an Excessive Amount of Evil Energy Has Been Unleashed from the Mortal World!”

Grateful for the empowerment of all Buddhas! I nearly failed to write this account today. These days, numerous obstacles have arisen to hinder my journey to the hells; trouble came one after another. First, my computer malfunctioned and I could not type. Later, non-human beings took advantage of my sleep to disturb me severely, draining my vital energy. I began to develop a fever, headache and extreme exhaustion. By this morning, I was fully afflicted with cold symptoms. Whenever I catch a cold, if I diligently recite mantras, it takes at least seven days to recover; otherwise, the illness lingers for half a month.

Just now, I used mental concentration to affirm that I must not fall ill today. I must journey to the hells and finish writing this record. I trusted I could accomplish this. I sat down and recited the Mahāmāyūrī Mantra. After roughly thirty minutes, my fever subsided, my runny nose stopped, my throat pain eased, and my headache faded. The symptoms of the cold started to abate. I am infinitely grateful for the blessings of Mahāmāyūrī and all Buddhas of the ten directions. I shall devote all my strength to this sacred work to repay the kindness of the Buddhas, lest I prove unworthy of their empowerment.

I set forth riding upon a white lotus flower. “Magistrate, *Amitabha*!”

Today the Magistrate took me to witness one of the hells of sexual misconduct — the Sword Blossom Hell for Yin Souls.

I asked the Magistrate: “What is the Sword Blossom Hell for Yin Souls?”

The Magistrate answered with a solemn countenance: “This hell is established for beings who indulge in masturbation and sexual misconduct while their mortal lifespans are not yet exhausted, including men who deliberately change female partners daily or frequently, growing arrogant in their deeds, as well as women who deliberately change male partners daily or frequently, priding themselves upon such conduct.

“These beings who transgress the precept against sexual misconduct and wallow in lust gravely disrupt the balanced vital qi of yin and yang between heaven and earth. Each time they engage in licentious acts, their minds emit abundant evil lustful qi. This wicked energy attracts ghosts, nature spirits and similar beings, who silently harm these people without their awareness. When such evil qi accumulates and grows overwhelmingly powerful, countless disasters will inevitably manifest in the mortal realm to offset this negative energy and restore cosmic equilibrium.

“Humanity gravely violates the natural laws of the cosmos, yet mortal lands impose no legal sanctions for such deeds. Laws in some Western nations even legalize cohabitation between men and women and the like. Those who drafted such legislation shall reap boundless karmic retribution in the hells. They cannot be freed from their karmic retributions in the hells until such laws are completely repealed in the mortal world. As the saying goes: ‘Bodhisattvas fear the causes, while ordinary beings fear the retributions.’ We must ensure every deed we perform each day conforms to the law of karma. We ought to be constantly vigilant. Never allow momentary negligence to attract evil retribution in future lifetimes. The King of the Netherworld has observed that an overwhelming surplus of evil qi has been unleashed upon the mortal realm, and many of these evil deeds are committed by underage youths. As a result, the King has ordered more new hells to be constructed within the Netherworld to punish these pre-terminal beings who transgress the precepts. It is hoped that by

seizing the yin souls of mortals and bringing them to the hells to undergo punishment, worldly people may be warned, their karmic offenses alleviated, and the duration of torment awaiting them after their lifespan ends may be reduced."

"Thank you, Magistrate, for your thorough explanation. I have learned yet more. I am truly grateful to you."

When I arrived at the Sword-Blossom Hell for Yin Souls, I saw it was extremely vast. Many children were undergoing torment here, especially those from Western nations; their numbers were staggering. Yin souls from Britain, the United States, France, China and nearly every other nationality could be seen throughout this hell.

At that moment, I watched the living souls of many boys being dragged forth by the nether wardens. A torture implement shaped like an iron blossom struck their genitals. They screamed in agony as blood gushed forth; the sight was absolutely harrowing. For female living souls, red-hot, white-hot implements shaped like iron blossoms were thrust into their lower bodies. Tormented by excruciating pain, they rolled on the ground, wailing bitterly. This hell held innumerable prisoners, and cries of suffering shook the heavens. The sounds distressed me deeply. I retreated shortly after arriving, my heart heavy with sorrow. If not for my duty to guide worldly beings, I would never wish to come here.

While mortals endure this punishment, they feel as though they are feverish, lying in bed trapped in a drowsy stupor. Why is this so? Their three souls have been seized and dragged to the hells to suffer torment, leaving them unable to live normally. Some think they are merely having a nightmare, yet the agony is far worse than any dream. Most can feel acute physical suffering, especially intense stabbing pain in their lower bodies. A small number of people awaken to the gravity of their suffering after enduring hellish torture, and resolve to reform themselves. The Magistrate said the Kings of the Netherworld regard this severe social crisis with great concern. Condemned souls endure torment

so that this harmful trend may be halted, preventing grave disasters from descending upon the mortal world.

Ayù wished to ask the Magistrate another question: “Why do the torments in these sexual-misconduct hells seem so modern, with torture devices such as computers and light-emitting ice mirrors?” The Magistrate replied: “Hells are mere reflections of the mortal world. Whenever mortals create modern items that facilitate transgressions against the precepts, matching torture instruments are immediately constructed in the hells to punish those offenders. Cosmetic surgery has grown extremely sophisticated in the mortal realm nowadays. For a price, people can completely alter their appearance without others noticing. While they might manage to deceive others and evade consequences on earth, the nether laws brook no such loopholes. Not even a total physical transformation can conceal one’s deeds. Even if someone has reincarnated through multiple lifetimes, our King of the Netherworld can still track them down instantly and bring them to justice. Ayù, upon your return, earnestly admonish mortal beings to abide by laws and duties, practice filial piety toward their parents, and uphold humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness. Do not dismiss these values as outdated clichés. They are the fundamental laws that sustain the orderly operation of heaven and earth. Those who refuse to follow them will inevitably be eliminated by natural order and subjected to karmic retribution. That concludes today’s visit. You may head back now, and return another time.”

I prostrated and took my leave of the Magistrate.

12 / The Hell of Gears, Wolves and Serpents

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! There is so much for which I must give thanks.

I am grateful to the Buddha! I am grateful for the unsurpassed Dharma sutras left by the Buddha!

I deeply love the Buddhist sutras, and I especially enjoy studying the original texts directly. It feels as if I were present at the Dharma assembly, transported back to Vulture Peak in India twenty-five hundred years ago, listening in person to the Buddha expound the sublime, wonderful voice of the Bodhi Dharma. Such a feeling cannot be fully described with plain words. Everyone ought to study the original sutras often; countless profound truths of life can all be found within them.

In all the sutras, the Buddha teaches us how to cultivate ourselves. Every detail within the Buddhist sutras is laid out with crystal clarity: upholding the precepts serves as the cause for Bodhi, concurrently practicing the six perfections and myriad virtuous practices, and cultivating assiduously until attaining Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. At first, many fellow practitioners may not understand the meaning of the sutras, yet this is of no consequence. If you persist in reading each day, understanding will gradually unfold; consistency each day is most vital.

When I first began to study the sutras, every reading felt supremely auspicious, yet afterwards I would forget everything at once. I only knew the experience was extraordinary, yet I could not recount the content. Truly, my karmic obstacles were heavy! Still, I loved the sutras, so I kept reciting them daily even if I forgot their meaning. After several years of such practice, I found I could retain some of the teachings, and naturally comprehend certain truths at different times and in different settings. Therefore

perseverance is of great importance. May all beings seize the opportunity while we still possess a healthy human body to study the sutras extensively. Human life is impermanent; once the breath departs, another lifetime begins. If we truly wish to repay the kindness of the Buddha, earnest cultivation and observance of the precepts are what make one a genuine disciple of the Buddha. Let us all strive together, cultivating diligently and guarding the precepts!

I set forth riding upon a white lotus flower.

“Amitabha!”I, Ayù, pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate.

Today the Magistrate took me to visit the Hell of Gears, Wolves and Serpents. Living beings condemned here for punishment are: men who, while alive, engaged in sexual relations with two women simultaneously; or women who engaged in sexual relations with two men simultaneously.

We arrived, and fierce wails of suffering met my ears once again.

I saw a naked man bound to a rotating wheel. Flanking the wheel were two supple serpents clinging almost entirely to his body — one scarlet red, the other dark cyan. One serpent coiled tightly around him, sinking its fangs into his head, face and ears, tearing chunks of flesh away, leaving blood everywhere. The other serpent bit his lower body. The man cried out in extreme agony.

Nearby stood a naked woman also bound to a rotating wheel. Two ferocious iron wolves on either side savaged her relentlessly. One wolf bit her chest, while the other attacked her lower body. The woman screamed desperately for help, yet no one came to her aid. The scene was extremely gory. These two souls were not advanced in years; they descended into this hell for retribution in their thirties. Truly tragic!

The Magistrate spoke to me with a stern expression:

“Such beings ruin their own spiritual nature and severely corrupt social morality; therefore the netherworld must mete out

severe punishment. They shall endure torment here for five hundred years, after which they will be dispatched to other hells for further judgment. The number of such beings continues to grow, and this hell has recently been expanded. You should come to visit more often in future. Aside from this hell of sexual misconduct, you must visit and record conditions in other hells, so that the book may be printed as soon as possible to benefit mortal beings. May they cease evil, repent, practice good deeds and accumulate merit, reducing their risk of falling into the hells and lessening disasters in the mortal world."

"Yes, Magistrate. Ayù shall obey. I will do everything within my power."

I returned by white lotus flower.

13 / First Encounter with Emperor Fengdu, Supreme Ruler of the Netherworld

I had devoted my utmost efforts to composing *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. Though I, Ayù, have limited schooling and my writing is simple and unrefined, my sincere wish that all sentient beings uphold the Buddha's precepts is utterly genuine.

Recently, I witnessed a female fellow-practitioner relentlessly slandering Teacher Tan. Her speech was vehement and allowed no room for reconciliation. Teacher Tan has shown me great kindness, and I have learned many vivid Buddhist truths from his writings, for which I am deeply grateful. Furthermore, the King of the Netherworld personally appointed Teacher Tan to review the manuscript of *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, and the teacher readily accepted the task. For the sake of liberating sentient beings from suffering and granting them joy, Teacher Tan would never decline such a mission. If slander against him hindered the publication and circulation of this book, the consequences would be extremely grave.

Hence I must do my part to stand up in support of Teacher Tan at this juncture. I will personally consult the Magistrate to clarify the truth of all matters.

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I set forth riding upon a white lotus flower.

I pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate.

Today I wished to ask the Magistrate: "Is what Teacher Tan expounds the true Dharma?"

The Magistrate replied: "What Teacher Tan expounds is indeed the true Dharma; there is no need to doubt it. Otherwise, why would the King of the Netherworld appoint him to review this

book? Ayù, by posing such a question, you seem to disregard the wisdom of the King of the Netherworld."

"Ah! Forgive me, Magistrate. I, Ayù, spoke improperly. Please pardon my fault."

The Magistrate said: "Before the Buddha attained enlightenment beneath the Bodhi Tree, Mara came to disrupt him fiercely. The Buddha repelled Mara's army with the samadhi concentration, plus the awesome divine power of compassion and meritorious virtue. Frustrated, Mara retreated and vowed: 'Though I cannot shake your concentration now, in the distant Dharma-Ending Age, I shall send my demon sons and grandsons to don your robes and destroy your Dharma.' With that threat, Mara departed in anger, and the Buddha shed tears of compassion. In truth, the Buddha was not worried that Mara would destroy the true Dharma. He pitied Mara's demonic kin, who would inevitably endure boundless suffering in the hells as karmic retribution for undermining the Buddha's teachings and slandering the true Dharma. Before entering final nirvana, the Buddha instructed his disciples: 'In future generations, practitioners must take the precepts as their teacher; practitioners shall rely upon the Dharma, not upon people.' To judge whether one's teachings are correct, the foremost standard is to verify if they align with the Buddhist sutras. As stated in the Shurangama Sutra: 'That which accords with my words is spoken by the Buddha; that which departs from my words is spoken by Pāpīyān.' Even during the Age of the true Dharma, while the Buddha walked the earth, demons still came to obstruct the true Dharma. How much more so now, in the Dharma-ending Age, when deviant teachers abound as the sands of the Ganges. Wherever the true Dharma abides, demons will surely appear. This also serves as a trial, an opportunity for spiritual refinement and advancement along the path of cultivation. While the Buddha was alive, his cousin Devadatta repeatedly slandered him, schemed to harm and

ruin him. In the end, Devadatta fell into the hells to undergo torment."

Just then, an official of the Netherworld arrived to deliver an announcement: "By order of Emperor Fengdu, the mortal Shangguan Yuhua is summoned immediately!" I was greatly startled. Emperor Fengdu is the supreme ruler of this realm, and he wished to see me. Wondering what momentous event had transpired, I proceeded forthwith together with the Magistrate.

We arrived at the grand hall. I knelt immediately to pay homage to Emperor Fengdu.

"Shangguan Yuhua, mortal woman of the Land of Zhendan in Jambudvīpa, bows before Emperor Fengdu! May Emperor Fengdu pardon my transgressions."

I beheld Emperor Fengdu clad in formal imperial robes and wearing a jeweled crown, seated upon a lofty throne. His complexion was dark, and his expression stern and solemn, inspiring awe and dread.

I remained kneeling in the great hall, not daring to lift my head to gaze upward.

Then Great Emperor Fengdu spoke: "I already know the purpose of your visit; hence I grant you this audience. The mortal Tan, alias Manjushri-Vimalakirti, expounds the true Dharma to guide living beings in the Dharma-Ending Age and purify human minds. Nowadays, moral standards in the mortal world continue to deteriorate, and teachings on karma and causality are gravely lacking. People no longer understand that good deeds bring good fruits and evil deeds bring evil retribution. Thus they recklessly advocate unrestrained notions, commit killing, indulge in sexual misconduct, and slander others, mistakenly claiming this is freedom of speech. Little do they know they have committed offenses of defaming others and vilifying the sacred teachings. What Tan expounds is the true Dharma that saves people's hearts, urging them to reform and turn towards goodness. Anyone who protects and upholds the true Dharma spoken by the Buddha shall

receive merits and rewards from me. If one abides by the Buddha's teachings and observes the precepts throughout their life, even if they only cultivate personally without propagating the Dharma, they shall certainly avoid suffering in the hells after death. If one not only cultivates and keeps the precepts all their life, but also shares and spreads the Buddhadharma to others, such a person shall receive augmented blessings and a lengthened lifespan, with good fortune extending to their descendants. If people refuse to cultivate and uphold the true Dharma, yet deliberately undermine and slander it, their blessings and lifespans shall inevitably be diminished in this present lifetime. Upon the end of their mortal lives, they will fall into the Hell of Tongue Ripping and the Hell of Wailing, and endure torments including eye gouging, heart piercing, ear chopping and other cruel hellish punishments. The duration of their torment depends on when all living beings who have accepted these slanderous remarks against the true Dharma re-establish right faith and resume practicing the true Dharma. Only then will the spirit of this person have a chance to escape the hells. Afterward, upon rebirth as a human, this person will be born into a lowly station, or be afflicted with impaired senses — blind, deaf, frail and emaciated. This person may also live in poverty amid harsh conditions, lacking material provisions, troubled by disharmony within the family, and plagued by countless other hardships. Hasten back and record my words. Persuade those who remain deluded not to slander the true Dharma; let them turn back and repent."

I prostrated in gratitude to Emperor Fengdu, the King of the Netherworld and all Magistrates! And then I returned by white lotus flower.

14 / The Hell of Electric-Light Screens — The New Hell Where Electric Ice Needles Are Fired

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha, I set forth riding upon a white lotus flower.

I pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate.

The Magistrate said, “I will take you to visit the Hell of Electric Light Screens today.”

What is the Hell of Electric-Light Screens? It punishes mortals who, while alive, produced pornographic publications, pornographic discs, obscene images, pornographic clips, lewd audio and speech, and the like. In short, it is for those who create pornographic products that stir improper fantasies or directly arouse lustful thoughts, then deliberately put them on websites for sentient beings to view, corrupting their minds and causing them to commit the karmic offence of sexual misconduct. Also punished are those who repost such pornographic products online to disturb the minds of sentient beings. Upon the end of their earthly lives, such beings must enter this hell to receive punishment.

All sentient beings confined within this hell to undergo retribution are bound to stay here until every piece of pornographic content they produced is thoroughly erased from every website. As for those who repost such material, they shall not depart until every being they corrupted has mended their ways and will never again engage in sexual misconduct incited by pornographic content.

I asked the Magistrate, “Quite a large number of souls are imprisoned in this hell. Why are there so many creators of such obscene content?”

The Magistrate replied, “Those who repost pornographic material commit the same kind of offense and shall likewise be sent to this hell for punishment, albeit with lesser offenses compared to the original creators. Online platforms are capable of poisoning countless innocent children within a short span of time, inflicting severe damage upon their mental development. The formative years of one’s mind lay the groundwork for one’s conduct in adulthood, yet nowadays many youths develop harmful vices from an early age. As stated in the Earth Store Sutra: ‘If one encounters evil conditions, unwholesome thoughts grow stronger moment by moment.’ Once bad habits solidify into second nature, these individuals will struggle to summon remorse and reform themselves later in life, unless they receive guidance from virtuous spiritual mentors. With computer technology advancing rapidly in the modern world, countless minors lacking education on karma and causality browse pornographic content online daily. Content creators and reposters must bear full responsibility for these karmic consequences. For this reason, the Netherworld constructed this special hell to impose severe penalties on such beings.”

I watched the souls in this hell trudge naked toward rows of computers. To them, the screens displayed nothing but pornographic material, yet what I saw were instruments of torment. These devices blazed bright scarlet with radiance. When the lust-addled condemned souls drew near, fiery crimson hooks shot out from the computers to gouge out their eyes in an instant. Then electric ice needles pierced their bodies, drawing blood everywhere. The needles struck their heads first before working their way down to cover their entire frames; the scene was utterly horrific. They are trapped in these endless torments with no foreseeable release, forced to endure until every trace of pornographic content vanishes from the mortal world. Such suffering is truly boundless. I could bear it no longer and resolved to leave this hell; the sight was too harrowing to behold.

The Magistrate went on to say: “Before *The Inexorable Nether Laws* is formally published, Ayù, you shall release the contents online in advance. Let those karmically connected beings share and repost these accounts to purify people’s minds. Everyone who helps repost the material has a major meritorious deed recorded in their personal register of good and evil within the Netherworld, a merit equal in weight to that of filial piety toward one’s parents. Licentiousness ranks as chief among all evils; filiality takes precedence among all virtues. Our Nether Sovereign Yama King most admires and praises filial mortals. That concludes today’s visit. You may return now.”

I pressed my palms together and took my leave of the Magistrate, then returned by white lotus flower.

15 / Unveiling Life in the Civilian District of the Netherworld

Since the publication of *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, some people assume this text was written via spirit-writing or spirit possession. Hence I must emphasize once more: I, Ayù, entered meditative stillness, clearing all wandering thoughts to concentrate my mental power. Supported by the Buddha's spiritual empowerment, I traveled atop a white lotus flower to the hell realms in an instant, in a fully conscious state. For this reason, the contents of *The Inexorable Nether Laws* have been verified through repeated journeys to the Netherworld, rendering it of great reference value. Any inaccuracies arise solely from mishearing due to my limited cultivation. Nonetheless, my aspiration to serve the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and help all sentient beings uphold the precepts is utterly sincere. Therefore, *The Inexorable Nether Laws* differs fundamentally from folk works produced through spirit-writing, spirit possession, invoking souls or dream visions. I earnestly ask all readers to distinguish and pay attention to this distinction.

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha, I set forth riding upon a white lotus flower.

I pressed my palms together and bowed to the Magistrate. Today my question was: "Does the Civilian District of the Netherworld belong to the ghost path?"

The Magistrate replied: "The Civilian District falls under the jurisdiction of the ghost path. It is inhabited by sentient beings who, when alive in the mortal world, led ordinary lives, neither notably virtuous nor gravely wicked. They committed no major good deeds nor serious evils, passing through a mediocre lifetime. Upon the end of their mortal lifespan, they are first escorted by the black and white impermanence messengers to the Hall of

Judgment, where their Register of Good and Evil Deeds is examined. Beings without karmic offences worthy of hell torment may be assigned to reside in this civilian district. Those possessing great virtuous karma may ascend to higher realms or be reborn back in the mortal world."

Today we were going to visit the civilian district of the Netherworld. With a thought, we arrived there. I found this place was vastly better than the hells; at the very least, the beings here endure no tortures. I observed that the souls dwelling here live much as humans do in the human realm, enjoying considerable freedom. They may move about freely and conduct simple trade and commerce.

There were adults and children, as well as shops. The sky hung grey; there was no sun, nor any moon or stars. Their garments were muted and lackluster. Devoid of tangible flesh-and-blood forms, their figures felt somewhat light and floating, unlike people walking in the mortal world, where one feels the pull of gravity. This is one of the distinguishing marks.

I stepped forward to look. A crowd of ghostly civilians gathered ahead. It turned out to be a long corridor lined with retail stalls. The passage stretched far into the distance, with vendors' booths on both sides. Each stall had one, two or three souls tending to trade.

There was also a food quarter. I glanced at their food and noticed something strange: none of it held any warmth; everything was stone cold. All provisions appeared substantial to the eye, yet when I held them in my hands, there was no sense of physical weight. A cup of water bears tangible weight in the mortal realm, yet things here gave me no such sense of weight. I watched to see how these souls consumed food. They seemed only to inhale sustenance, and the process was swift. At that moment, a female vendor called out to me.

I greeted the vendor: "Hello! What is this?"

“This is freshly made, soothing and refreshing soup. Drink it now, then have it again next year.”

What! One serving a year? Even ganoderma lucidum cannot boast such potency. One serving sustains them through an entire year. Truly remarkable nourishment.

Just then, the vendor’s hand brushed against mine. She said: “Your body temperature is quite high. Take care of yourself. Come, have a bowl; it will cool you and bring ease.” I smiled and replied: “Thank you, but I shall pass today.” I had naturally run a low temperature since childhood in the mortal world, yet here in the civilian district, my warmth struck them as unusually high. Along the way, I watched souls shopping freely. This district carried a quiet, muted atmosphere. Yin energy lingered, yet it was vastly milder than the aura permeating the hells.

I wished to ask the Magistrate: “What is the average lifespan of beings dwelling in this civilian district? And do they take in food by sucking it in?”

The Magistrate answered: “Their shortest lifespan spans three hundred years, while the longest reaches one thousand five hundred years. Those who possess good roots and engage in cultivation may pass away sooner, to be reborn among humans or in the heaven realms.

As for food, they do not require three daily meals like human beings. Souls of the Netherworld subsist upon contact food, absorbing the essence of food. One intake suffices to sate them for roughly a year. If their living descendants make offerings once at Qingming in April, this supply can sustain them for a full year. Bear this vital warning: mortals must never offer meat to honor ancestors. Sacrificial meat only heaps further karmic offences upon their forebears dwelling in the ghost path. Descendants ought to make offerings of vegetarian food, fresh flowers and fruits instead. Naturally, the finest form of commemoration is to recite sutras, chant the Buddha’s name, cultivate virtue and perform good deeds, then dedicate the resulting meritorious

virtues to ancestors, repaying their parental kindness and helping their ancestors ascend at the earliest opportunity.

We shall conclude our visit for today. Do not forget to inform living people upon your return: cease offering animal flesh to ancestors, for it only brings further suffering upon the departed."

This journey touring the Netherworld Civilian District broadened my horizons immensely; I learned many truths. I discovered that after people die and become ghosts, there is indeed another realm and world in which their unfinished karmic lives continue.

I expressed gratitude to the Magistrate for his teachings, and went home by white lotus flower.

16 / Creators of Western-Han Erotic Paintings from More Than 1,900 Years Ago Are Still Imprisoned and Suffering in the Great Hell

I am grateful for all the compassionate expedients employed by the Buddha to guide and take across living beings, which create many opportunities for everyone to cultivate. Progress in cultivation knows no standstill; to cease advancing is to regress. I truly felt remorseful. I had planned to journey to the hell realm last night yet postponed the trip due to exhaustion. I came before the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to pray and repent. In many sutras, the Buddha teaches us all how to strive diligently and uphold the precepts. How ashamed I am!

In the Avatamsaka Sutra, the Buddha proclaimed: “Sons of the Buddha! Bodhisattva Mahasattvas possess ten kinds of diligent vigour. What are the ten? The diligent vigour to teach and transform all sentient beings; the diligent vigour to deeply penetrate all dharmas; the diligent vigour to purify and adorn all worlds; the diligent vigour to cultivate all studies of the Bodhisattvas; the diligent vigour to eradicate all evils of sentient beings; the diligent vigour to quell sufferings within the three evil realms; the diligent vigour to vanquish all hordes of demons; the diligent vigour to vow to become a pure eye for all sentient beings; the diligent vigour to make offerings to all Buddhas; the diligent vigour to gladden all Tathagatas. These are the ten. If Bodhisattvas abide in these practices, they will attain the perfect unsurpassed vigour Paramita of the Tathagatas.” I perceive I still have shortcomings in cultivating diligent vigour, so I must redouble my efforts.

Next, in the Maharatnakuṭa Sutra • Assembly of the Bodhisattva Piṭaka, the Buddha stated: “Do not be fearful, alarmed, terrified or intimidated. Arouse the four kinds of steadfast and valiant resolve. Redouble your diligence toward the subtle Dharma door of the Bodhisattva Piṭaka; never abandon, relinquish, distance yourself from or depart from them. Fully attain acute understanding rooted in firm faith, unwavering faith, steadfast patience, and steadfast upright diligence. Shariputra, I shall explain to you expedient parables of steadfast patience and steadfast upright diligence, so that Bodhisattvas can attain these virtues and walk the Bodhisattva path without clinging to their bodies and lives.” I was overwhelmed with remorse. I grew weary after only a few successive trips to the netherworld, and I was truly unworthy of the profound grace bestowed through the teachings of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. I must persist in strictly upholding the precepts and cultivating diligently to repay their boundless kindness. I also wish that all beings could attain boundless spiritual power, advance bravely and diligently, practise upright diligent vigour, and guard the precepts as one guards a luminous pearl.

Before setting off, I noticed an extra lotus blossom beneath my feet. My gratitude went to the Dharma protectors! The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are forever compassionate! Thanks to this additional lotus, I travelled far more swiftly. I arrived at the hell realms in an instant. The Magistrate was already waiting for me, and I stepped forward to bow respectfully to him.

Today I hoped to consult the Magistrate regarding the karmic retribution incurred by those who write, print and sell erotic books, the proprietors who produce pornographic films and manufacture pornographic discs, the actors who star in pornographic films, and those who sell items that incite lust, such as aphrodisiacs.

The Magistrate immediately led me to view a realm named the Rolling Blaze Hell. As we conversed, we began to perceive a

peculiar, oppressive aura — a profoundly negative energy, best described as lustful vapour. All hells are permeated by boundless yin qi, yet in this particular hell, the lustful vapour far overwhelms the yin qi; desire-laden fumes dominate everything. A thick, rank stench also hung heavy in the air. Were it not for the mission of sharing these truths with the public, I would have no wish to behold this sight.

We arrived at the Rolling Blaze Hell. All we could hear were deafening wails and agonized groans. Countless condemned souls, men and women, dwelt here. None spoke or communicated with one another — no greetings, no words of comfort. Not even a simple utterance such as “Do you suffer?” passed between them, for every condemned soul endured unceasing hellish torment without respite.

I saw one condemned soul perched upon a tiny chair, pressing his hands against it to hold himself upside down, head lowered and feet raised in an exaggerated posture. Presently he crashed to the ground, only to revive and repeat the torture again and again. The Magistrate explained that this is the karmic retribution for those who, while alive, delighted in writing lewd depictions of sexual misconduct, such as positions where the woman stands inverted and the man upright.

Another soul supported himself on a single palm, trembling and sweating from exhaustion. The moment his strength failed, giant birds swooped down to devour him. Once reborn, he endured the same punishment anew. This soul had, in his lifetime, revelled in describing wildly exaggerated sexual acts, including flagellation and pursuits of extreme sensual stimulation.

One soul spun round and round upon the ground without cease. Should he halt, massive wolves would rush forward to tear him limb from limb. Such is the requital for those who concocted aphrodisiac and hallucinogenic potions to arouse lust.

A soul was forced to stand perpetually on one leg, locked in a posture mimicking sexual intercourse. If he stumbled and

stopped, enormous iron birds hurtled down and struck him dead. A karmic wind revived him, and the cycle of suffering resumed. This penalty awaited those who authored pornographic texts.

Yet another soul was compelled to swallow endless doses of medicine. Whenever he ceased, violent wracking overcame him until he hovered near death, after which he was forced to ingest more drugs. These were the souls who researched and manufactured aphrodisiacs and passion-stimulating concoctions in their mortal lives.

One soul clutched a torch-like instrument of torture and ceaselessly burned his own genitals until they rotted away. Then the karmic wind restored his flesh, and the torment began once more. This is the retribution for those who traded devices designed to incite lust.

Two souls each grasped writhing, vibrating small serpents, which coiled around their genitals to torment them. The souls endured excruciating agony as their private parts were mangled. In life, these two were proprietors selling adult sexual merchandise.

A soul sat upon a minuscule, sharp, searing chair placed atop a fire-spitting red-hot platform, forced to write. I reached out to perceive his thoughts; his mind churned with schemes for composing obscene literature. The instant he attempted to write, both hands were incinerated, only to regenerate so he might undergo the fiery torture afresh. This is the fate of all writers of erotic books.

Nearby, male and female souls appeared to gaze greedily upon obscene texts. (Owing to inverted delusions, their minds were saturated with lust, so they beheld lascivious scrolls, yet to my eyes, the objects were merely blank sheets.) A colossal printing machine resembling a giant computer stood here. Whenever they sought to print lewd writings, the vast apparatus sucked them inside, crushing their bodies into pulp. Blood splattered everywhere amid deafening screams. The unbearable torment

was unspeakable, repeated tens of millions of times each day. I could bear to watch no longer, overcome with immense distress. These sufferings are the tremendous karmic retributions endured by those who film pornographic motion pictures and produce pornographic discs.

I drew a deep breath, then asked the Magistrate: “How many years must these condemned souls endure such retribution?”

The Magistrate replied: “It is hard to state exactly how long they must endure retribution. Generally speaking, they may only escape this hell once all the obscene books they wrote and printed, pornographic films and discs they produced, aphrodisiacs and libido-stimulating drugs they manufactured vanish entirely from the mortal world. Even if they are reborn as humans, they inevitably receive karmic retribution that condemns them to humble, lowly social stations. Only the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas know the true exact duration of their torment. This hell has recently been expanded into many tiers, with many different new forms of punishment added. In the past, this hell occupied far less space. Nowadays, advanced technology enables obscene products to be printed and manufactured at staggering speed and volume. Sex shops have also proliferated across the mortal realm. Hence, the number of beings who transgress the precepts and are sent here to suffer is beyond counting. Truly, hell is a reflection of the mortal world. Whenever new forms of transgression emerge among humans, extensions are built within hell forthwith to match the requirements of karmic requital. Beings who commit such evils come here to endure their suffering once their mortal lives end.”

I said: “These punishments with no fixed end — are they as agonizing as those in the Avīci Hell?” The Magistrate answered: “The afflictions endured by souls here are still vastly milder compared to the sufferings endured by those in the Great Avīci Hell. Such books and obscene products bring harm to innumerable sentient beings. Notably, internet pornography

pollutes even innocent children of pure yang constitution. Such offences shall neither be tolerated nor pardoned under the nether laws. Let me explain. If actors are forced to star in pornographic films, their karmic retribution shall be lighter: one hundred years of torment, provided that they vow never to repeat such deeds and repent of their karmic transgressions. If an actor appears in only one pornographic film for money and never does so again, the punishment is one thousand years. Should they personally purchase and burn all copies of the pornographic discs in which they appeared, accompanied by sincere repentance, five hundred years of their punishment shall be remitted. Directors who film pornography and those who produce and distribute pornographic discs shall be cast into this hell after death and shall not be released until every related film and disc ceases to exist. Other supporting crew members shall be sent here to endure fifty-thousand years of torment. All proprietors, actors, directors and relevant staff who write, print or sell obscene books, or produce pornographic films and discs shall suffer diminished blessings and shortened lifespans in this lifetime. For each obscene book or film involved, one year shall be deducted from their blessings and lifespans."

I asked the Magistrate further: "What retribution awaits those who run websites selling pornographic videos and discs, or make such materials available for public download, whether for payment or free of charge?" The Magistrate said: "The principle remains the same. Such wrongdoers are also cast into this hell. They may only leave once every pornographic disc they circulated disappears forever from the mortal realm and all associated pornographic websites are permanently shut down. When you return, earnestly warn all people to abide by laws, uphold proprieties and observe the precepts, so they may escape heavenly chastisement. We shall conclude here for today. Depart upon your lotus flower now; you may return another time."

I wish to clarify for all readers: my visits to the hell realms and all truths that I witnessed occurred while my consciousness remained fully awake. I journeyed there relying upon the spiritual power of the Buddha, not in dreams, nor through spirit-writing divination practised by groups such as Tian-Dao or Yi-Guan-Dao. I myself am a Buddhist disciple who has taken refuge in the Three Jewels, follows a vegetarian diet consistently and observes the Five Precepts. I am known as Ayù. Every word recorded above is true. I dedicate the meritorious virtues of compiling this writing to all sentient beings, and wish that everyone can attain Buddhahood.

17 / Attending a Tribunal for the Second Time — Witnessing the Two Departments of Rewarding Goodness and Punishing Evil Recorded in Ancient Texts

Ayù has recently been touring the Hells of Sexual Misconduct. Among all hell realms, the Hells of Sexual Misconduct occupy the widest expanse of territory. This shows that sexual misconduct constitutes an extremely grave crisis plaguing the mortal world today. The Buddha of supreme wisdom foretold this issue in numerous sutras long ago, and thoroughly explained how to permanently eliminate this innate fundamental obsession that binds all beings. We ought to diligently study the Buddhist sutras to understand the origin of lustful disorder and the methods to resolve it. Countless sutras discuss matters concerning sexual misconduct; it is impossible to enumerate them all here, so only several examples are cited below.

The Buddha Speaks the Extinction of the Dharma Sutra states: “There is no morality. People indulge in sexual debauchery and chaos, with no proper distinction maintained between men and women. … As the kalpa draws near its end, days and months grow shorter, and human lifespans shrink. People’s hair turns white by the age of forty. Men surrender to lust, exhausting their vital essence and meeting an early death; some live to sixty. Male lifespans will be brief, while women enjoy longer lives — seventy or ninety years, and even up to a hundred.”

The Sutra of Forty-Two Chapters records these verses: “Desire arises within your intention, while your intention springs forth from your thinking and thoughts. When the mind of duality

becomes still and tranquil, one abides in the state of neither form nor activity."

The Shurangama Sutra delivers an even clearer teaching: "If sentient beings of the six realms throughout all worlds free their minds from lust, they will no longer be trapped within the continuity of birth and death. You cultivate samadhi with the fundamental aim of escaping worldly afflictions. Unless lustful thoughts are eliminated, liberation from mundane existence can never be attained. Even with great wisdom and samadhi manifesting before you, if lust remains unsevered, one will inevitably fall into the demonic path. …"

In the sutras, the Buddha earnestly exhorted all beings that licentiousness arises from inverted thoughts within one's own mind. Intentions spring from one's thinking and thoughts, and every being bears the seed that fuels the transmigration of birth and death. The Buddha instructed us to completely sever all lascivious impulses in both body and mind.

A Buddhist sutra states:

"I who have committed unwholesome karmic deeds am like a charred wooden pillar;

unadorned in this life, so too shall I be in the next.

Ungraceful within the house, the same without;

evil causes breed evil karma, leading one down the evil realms.

In future lives I shall endure agony, not knowing where I shall dwell;

all heavenly beings hear my mournful weeping.

With none to offer deliverance, hell shall be my inevitable fate."

May all sentient beings destined to encounter this writing uphold right faith and right mindfulness, practice the genuine Dharma, transcend suffering and attain bliss.

Grateful for the Buddha's supporting empowerment, Ayù departed by white lotus flower.

Ayù pressed her palms to pay homage to the Magistrate.

The Magistrate spoke gravely: “Two condemned souls, one male and one female, have arrived at the judgment hall to stand trial today. The man was a procurer, and the woman a brothel madam.”

I replied: “Very well. Thank you, Magistrate, for arranging for me to observe the trial.”

We arrived, and I immediately heard a heavy pounding on the table. Ah! I beheld King Taishan of the Seventh Nether Court, who was filled with towering wrath. He was on the verge of leaving his seat; he stood up and leaned down to shout sternly at the condemned souls: “Audacious condemned souls! Your souls have already descended to the nether realm, yet you still dare to quibble and defend your crimes?! What do you mean by mutual consent, by food and sex being human nature, by relieving worldly afflictions?! This is nothing but utter nonsense. You two were a couple living a comfortable middle-class life on earth with stable livelihoods, yet you spurned honest occupations. For the sake of money, you recruited and deceived innocent young girls and women, getting them to engage in prostitution. This is your first crime. You even schemed to deceive them, luring them into your trap, and then exploited the hard-earned money they made from prostitution. This is your second crime. You deliberately got these young girls and women to take drugs, gamble, drink alcohol and smoke, saddling them with heavy debts so you could control them and trap them in the sex trade. This is your third crime. When they unfortunately became pregnant, you deliberately arranged for them to have abortions, harming innocent lives. This is your fourth crime. All these heinous acts you have committed are utterly shameful!”

Beside King Taishan were two high-ranking officials of the Netherworld. One presided over the Department of Rewarding Goodness. I saw him robed in dark purple-black garments, his features calm with a faint smile. Such a gentle countenance is rare to behold in the realms of hell. All the Netherworld officials I had

seen before looked stern, terrifying and very fierce. The other senior official headed the Department of Punishing Evil. Clad in dark green robes, he wore a vicious, wrathful expression, his eyes glimmering with a pale ghostly white light. Just one glance from him made me feel uneasy all over. Both directors wore hats of the same style, matching the color of their robes.

Then came King Taishan's voice: "Bring forth the Register of Punishing Evil and read it aloud at once." The head of the Department of Punishing Evil produced the Register — it was incredibly long. With a stern bearing, he began to recite every crime perpetrated by the two condemned souls. Their misdeeds were truly innumerable; I shall recount only a portion for all to grasp their depravity.

While alive, these two condemned souls sought to control young women as tools for profit. They forced these women to undergo repeated abortions and corrupted them with harmful vices. Later, some of these women were taken as wives or concubines by men bound to them by karmic fate. Yet some of the women's families broke apart because they were unable to bear children. Others endured permanent lifelong ailments as a result of drug use and abortions, such as chronic gynaecological illnesses, central nervous system disorders, numbness of the limbs and more. One woman, driven insane, was cast aside by her husband then abandoned by her family, left destitute on the streets. Countless unspeakable tragedies unfolded from their deeds.

King Taishan commanded: "You two fierce, fanged ghost attendants, hear my order! Take them away immediately, and cast them into the Hell of Roaring Blaze to endure one hundred thousand years of torment first. We shall judge whether remorse stirs within their hearts before delivering a final verdict." The two condemned souls trembled violently, their bodies shaking uncontrollably, yet it was already far too late.

The Magistrate said: “Condemned souls such as these generally endure torment in hell for an extremely long time. They cannot depart the great hells until every sentient being whom they harmed has fully recovered, and all lingering aftereffects — brought on by their instigation of drug abuse, abortions and the like — have completely vanished.”

Ayù asked the Magistrate: “If certain deeds leave deep, poisonous impressions upon the minds of victims, whose wounds may take many lifetimes to heal completely, does that mean the condemned souls must wait through those many lifetimes?” The Magistrate replied: “That is correct. The recovery period differs for every harmed being, some shorter, some longer. Naturally, shorter recovery times are preferable. Yet some souls cling fiercely to attachments; a single unresolved affliction may take a thousand years to settle. A spirit may linger in a certain realm and refuse to depart, all because of clinging obsession. There once was a young prostitute. She possessed some beauty and fortunately did not fall prey to severe harmful vices, only picking up smoking and drinking. In truth, she disliked these habits but learned them out of occupational necessity. At the instigation and arrangement of the pimp and madam, she underwent six abortions within just eighteen months. Later, a merchant karmically connected to her took her as his wife. The merchant did not know she had suffered six abortions at such a young age. After marriage, lingering complications from the abortions left her permanently infertile and plagued by gynecological illness. Before long, the merchant took another wife to carry on his family line. Overcome with resentment after being cast aside for her barrenness, the woman’s spirit lingered in the ghost realm for a full thousand years following her death. She only departed after encountering the genuine Dharma destined for her.”

The Magistrate continued: “This is merely a simplified account for your understanding. Whenever a condemned soul receives punishment in hell, the fates of all other souls injured by that

wrongdoer must be taken into account. Fundamentally, the condemned soul cannot leave hell until every being they harmed — regardless of which of the six paths they presently inhabit — has escaped suffering. No final verdict can yet be made regarding how long these two condemned souls will suffer in hell; their karmic punishment has only just begun."

"Very well. We shall conclude here for today. Return now."

"Yes, Magistrate."

I pressed my palms together to take my leave, filled with gratitude toward the Magistrate, and returned by white lotus flower.

18 / The Hellish Retribution for Circulating and Sharing Pornographic Books, Periodicals and Discs

I have been swamped with various matters and have also secluded myself for inner spiritual cultivation, leaving me no opportunity to journey to the hells to gather materials for writing articles. I sincerely apologize for keeping everyone waiting. I only travel to the hells when my mental state is at its peak. Each trip depletes some of my vital energy, and I must continuously recite mantras to replenish it after returning. Although my condition is good today, forces from another dimension have come to obstruct me and prevent me from writing. Their power is considerable, and they have wasted half of my day. To break precepts for even a single day makes one a follower of demons. This is what Ayù firmly believes. Whenever I encounter obstacles, I overcome them by practising the mindset of upholding the precepts. This Buddhist method is highly effective. I share it with everyone now, as it has worked flawlessly every time so far.

Before entering nirvana, the Buddha told Ananda: “In the Dharma-Ending Age, practitioners shall take the precepts as their teacher and rely upon the Dharma, not upon people.” The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom, Volume Two states: “The Buddha takes patience as armor, diligence as steel cuirass, observance of precepts as steed, dhyana as fine bow, and wisdom as fine arrows. With these, he conquers the army of demon kings externally and eliminates the bandit of afflictions internally; this is called an Arhat.” Furthermore, The Sutra of Śakra’s Questions to the Buddha states: “Those who disregard the Buddha’s

prohibitory precepts should now feel shame." All these teachings demonstrate how vitally important it is to uphold the precepts!

Let my spiritual power converge! Namo Mahāmāyūrī! Namo Mahāmāyūrī! I shall break through these obstacles and head for the hells immediately.

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, I set forth by white lotus flower and arrived at the hells instantly.

Amitabha! I pressed my palms together toward the Magistrate.

Today I wished to ask the Magistrate about the retribution for circulating pornographic books, periodicals and discs.

The Magistrate said: "An excellent question. Countless young people across the mortal world engage in such harmful conduct nowadays. Ayù, when you return, remember to warn all mortal sentient beings afflicted with these depraved habits. They must immediately repent thoroughly, reform their wrongdoings, and cultivate virtue and good deeds, so as to avoid terrifying retribution in hell and stop harming themselves and others. This message is extremely vital; bear it well in mind!"

"Yes, Magistrate! Ayù will write this down right away upon returning."

The Magistrate stated: "Any mortal who circulates pornographic publications and discs either in person or through computers incurs karmic retribution equal to that of those who sell such materials. Their standard punishment consists of one hundred thousand years of torment in hell. For severe offenses, they cannot be released from boundless hellish suffering until every piece of pornographic content they spread vanishes entirely from the mortal world. From the very first time someone shares obscene materials, the black and white co-born deities accompanying them, who record good and evil, record the deed instantly. Each act of circulation depletes their blessings and lifespan. While they are still living, nether attendants will first seize their living souls and bring them to the Rod and Whip Hell

for punishment. I have previously described the horrific scenes of this hell, so I will not elaborate here. Mortals feel headaches and muddled, confused consciousness; most feel feverish and have nightmares, then wake with stinging pains all over their bodies. Those who have undergone such soul punishments during their lifetimes and then sincerely repent and reform may have their future hellish karmic penalties mitigated or remitted. Nevertheless, final judgments will be made after evaluating each individual case. Stubborn wrongdoers whose blessings are exhausted will be directly cast into the Hells of Sexual Misconduct. The specific hell they enter depends on the type of content they circulated:

• Those sharing only materials concerning masturbation are sent to the Pill-Swallowing Hell;

• Those spreading only pornographic computer images go to the Electric Eye Hell;

• Those distributing only discs depicting sexual misconduct involving one man and two women, or one woman and two men, are condemned to the Gear, Wolf and Snake Hell;

• Those who share only pornographic discs featuring incest suffer torment in the Inverted Wheel Ice Hell.

Such examples are innumerable. Anyone guilty of circulating all these varieties of pornographic content must endure punishment sequentially in every corresponding Hell of Sexual Misconduct. You have personally visited all these hells, Ayù. Return now and tell sentient beings in the mortal world that circulating pornographic publications and discs creates boundless evil karmas leading to hell. Exhort them to abandon this harmful habit as soon as possible, lest they harm both themselves and others. Technology is advanced today; information can spread across the globe through computers within mere seconds. Yet do people ever stop to reflect? In spreading such information that harms people's spiritual nature, one unwittingly sows boundless evil karma leading to hell in an instant. Sentient beings of the

mortal world ought to cherish their rare human bodies. Otherwise, the righteous energy of heaven and earth will fall out of balance, and disasters will inevitably descend upon the human world, prompting people to examine themselves. By then, it will be too late. When disasters descend, evil karma has already ripened; immense suffering will engulf humanity, and scenes of grief will be seen everywhere. Out of compassion, the Buddha specially sent you, Ayù, to visit the netherworld. Hasten back and share everything you have seen with the sentient beings in the mortal world."

After prostrating in gratitude to the Magistrate for his efforts, I returned home by white lotus flower.

19 / Restoring Sentient Beings' Original Yang Body — Authoritative Views from the Netherworld on Handling Pornographic Materials in the Mortal World

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha, I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"*Amitabha*!" I pressed my palms together to pay homage to the Magistrate.

Today I wished to ask the Magistrate: "How should pornographic materials be dealt with, and what merit is gained by destroying them?"

The Magistrate said: "Pornographic materials must be destroyed. Such things must not remain in the mortal world, and they must be thoroughly eradicated. So long as these materials exist, mankind's innate spiritual nature will be contaminated. This pollution directly and swiftly extinguishes the radiance of one's innate spiritual nature."

"The pre-heaven original yang born with every being is of supreme purity, yang and brightness. Once the radiance of one's spiritual nature fades, dims, or vanishes, this present lifetime draws to an end. Some people believe casually viewing these materials brings no harm, as long as they do not act upon their urges, regarding such viewing merely as sexual knowledge or sex education. This notion is erroneous.

"One must never view pornographic materials, not even once. Even a single viewing sullies the radiance of the innate spiritual nature. What is more, it plants a seed of lust within one's mind.

When unfavorable karmic conditions arise in the future, it will become exceedingly difficult to keep one's mind from wavering.

"When adolescents, who still possess the constitution of pure yang, encounter pornographic content, their minds are certain to be stirred, though the degree of disturbance varies from person to person. Especially in this modern age of high-technology computing, pornographic websites run rampant without restraint. Multitudes lose full mastery over their minds, falling into habits such as masturbation, and their pure original yang essence dissipates forthwith. Even if it is not completely depleted, portions slip away imperceptibly. As time passes, this culminates in the commission of sexual misconduct.

"Pornographic materials gravely undermine chastity and morality, stripping sentient beings of all sense of shame and decency and triggering moral collapse. In this lifetime, those consumed by such materials suffer diminished blessings and shortened lifespans, dishonor their ancestors, sever their family lineages, and accrue severe karmic debts of sexual misconduct that condemn them to excruciating torments in hell.

"We have previously elaborated extensively on the boundless retributions awaiting wrongdoers in the various Hells of Sexual Misconduct. Once wrongdoers are trapped within these hells, there is no release date in sight. Countless tragedies of broken families stem directly from sexual misconduct, and pornographic materials stand as the primary culprit that lures people into this vice. These works poison hearts, subvert cosmic principles, and corrupt human ethics. Far more destructive than mortal poisons, they ravage one's spiritual nature and wisdom-life. Ordinary poisons end only a single mortal lifetime, yet pornography ravages one's pure original yang essence, cutting lives short and condemning souls to endure boundless suffering in hell. Even if one eventually escapes the hells after immense hardship, countless residual karmic consequences of sexual misconduct remain to be repaid. These include various illnesses linked to

sexual misconduct, alongside manifold spiritual afflictions; the list stretches on without end.

“Sentient beings who possess financial means may do what they can to buy pornographic materials and destroy them. Publishers and bookstores should refrain from distributing or selling such materials. Directors, performers, actors and actresses must not participate in or produce pornographic films. Writers, painters and all creators of publications ought not compose lustful texts or draw obscene imagery. Corporate leaders, regional rulers, kings, and all persons of substantial influence should completely prohibit and eradicate pornographic materials. Upon discovering such materials, they ought to issue immediate orders for their thorough destruction. Those lacking both financial resources and any of the above capacities may still act according to circumstances and conditions, striving to persuade relevant parties to destroy pornographic materials.

“Any sentient being who endeavours to destroy pornographic materials by any of the above means shall gain increased blessings and lifespan, win the respect of others, preserve their wealth, and develop greater wisdom within this lifetime. For practitioners who properly seek transcendental aspirations, their wishes shall gradually be fulfilled, and they shall progress steadily forward. A great meritorious virtue will be recorded in their personal Register of Good and Evil, Life and Death within the underground world. This substantial meritorious virtue can serve to mitigate the hellish karmic seeds planted in past lives. The final verdict for each individual case rests with the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and senior officials of the underground world.

“Ayù, let us end our discussion here today. Hasten back and write an account for everyone.”

“Yes, Magistrate!” I pressed my palms together in gratitude, and then returned by white lotus flower.

20 / Retribution for Abortion and the Infant Souls' Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead

Grateful for the Buddha's supporting empowerment, Ayù departed by white lotus flower.

Amitabha!

"Magistrate! Today Ayù wishes to ask you about the karmic retribution brought by abortion."

The Magistrate said, "Abortion is an act severely punished by the netherworld authorities. The laws of the netherworld set forth three ways to cultivate hidden virtue. The first is to save human lives; the second is to support widows in preserving their chastity; the third is to perform supreme good deeds without letting others know. Under the law of karma, hidden virtue is potent enough to reshape a person's destiny. Throughout history, many famous examples show hidden virtue leading people to become high officials and dignitaries in the human world, with distinguished descendants. Someone destined to live in poverty may, through cultivating hidden virtue, become a high-ranking dignitary with prominent descendants in the mortal world. Di Renjie (630–700), Chancellor of the Tang Dynasty, stands as a typical example. When Di Renjie was young and traveling to the capital for imperial examinations, he checked into an inn. Late at night, the inn's widowed landlady, a beautiful woman, attempted to seduce him. Di Renjie remained vigilant, guided by his unwavering integrity. Not only did he strictly refrain from immoral sexual conduct himself, but he also exhorted the widow to abide by feminine virtues. He patiently taught her the Buddhist practice of Contemplation on the Impurity of the Body, which he used to quell carnal desires. After practicing this contemplation, the widow was

filled with remorse and maintained unwavering loyalty and chastity for the rest of her life. Later, precisely because Di Renjie rejected this unsolicited temptation, his fame spread far and wide across the realm. If mortal beings can break free from predestined karmic trials, uphold pure moral precepts, and preserve their noble integrity wholeheartedly, Heaven will never treat them unjustly. The nether laws will record tremendous hidden meritorious virtues on one's Register of Life and Death, augmenting one's blessings and wisdom. Abortion essentially snatches the life of a sentient being, violating the precept against killing. An unborn child, inherently pure and kind, is slain. This karmic offense bears equal gravity to killing one's father or mother, and shedding the blood of a Buddha, while also forging malevolent karmic bonds with the child. As the common saying goes: 'No kinship forms without past goodwill or grievance.'

"The karmic bond between a child and its parents falls into two categories: the child comes either to repay a debt or to claim repayment for a debt owed. If the child arrives to repay a debt, being killed will plant resentment in its heart, turning the bond into a harmful one. If the child originally comes to collect a debt, matters grow far worse. Malicious ties combined with hatred will only entrench the cycle of karmic indebtedness further.

"There are three circumstances surrounding abortion. First: The parents do not intend to abort, yet the fetus lacks sufficient blessings. Examples include fetal death in the womb, molar pregnancy, or maternal illness and other circumstances that prevent the child from being born. In such cases, the parents must repent sincerely, recite sutras for deliverance, and dedicate the merits so the infant souls may escape suffering and attain well-being at an earlier time.

"Second: Abortion is undertaken due to financial difficulties. This is forbidden by nether law; financial hardship cannot justify taking a life. How one resolves troubles matters greatly. No matter how difficult life in the mortal world may be, it is vastly better

than suffering retribution in hell after an abortion — bear this firmly in mind! It is also possible that this infant has come to repay your kindness. If brought to birth, your family's finances may improve, bringing modest prosperity. Naturally, this depends on each individual case. Those who commit such abortions will have their blessings diminished in this lifetime: physical health, career prospects, wealth and more will all decline. After death, they will suffer retribution for one thousand years in the Sword Forest Hell. If the abortion takes place outside marriage, the offender will first endure five hundred years of punishment in the Rod and Whip Hell. Even after being reborn as a human, residual karmic consequences for the killing remain. For instance, women may suffer gynecological illnesses, and men may develop disorders of the reproductive system.

"Third, this is the most prevalent type among mortals nowadays. Many unmarried men and women resort to abortion once they conceive a child, and this act incurs the gravest karmic retribution. Their blessings will be depleted while they are still alive. Upon the end of their lifespan, they first undergo punishment for eight hundred years in the Rod and Whip Hell, followed by two thousand years of torment in the Sword Forest Hell. Women who undergo abortion bear heavier karmic guilt than men, for it is the woman who makes the final decision to proceed with the abortion. Hence her transgression weighs more. On the contrary, if a man pressures a woman to have an abortion, but the woman ultimately protects the fetus and gives birth to the child, a bad deed will be recorded against the man, while hidden meritorious virtue of good conduct will be credited to the woman. If the man later repents sincerely, takes good care of the child, and earnestly exhorts mortals not to commit abortion, his karmic offense of inciting others to abort may be lifted. Ayù, would you like to go and see it?"

I said: "Very well!" We arrived soon after. This place is different from the Hell of Sexual Misconduct, which is pervaded by lewd

thoughts and agonized wails. Here, heavy resentful wails and tormented screams reverberate everywhere. Above us were four large Chinese characters meaning “Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead.”

Good heavens! There are countless tiny figures packed tightly together, all weeping bitterly. Their cries are heart-rending; tears came to my eyes as I watched. Some shriek aloud in anguish, while others remain crumpled into ghastly blobs of blood.

The Magistrate explained that these mangled forms are the result of the doctors’ brutal dismemberment during abortions. One infant soul remains huddled tightly in a ball, paralyzed by terror. Though its soul form is fully capable of stretching out, it is trapped in the persistent torment of its traumatic memories, unable to break free. I asked the Magistrate how it might find relief from such agony. He replied that it hinges on whether its earthly parents offer sincere repentance or perform meritorious deeds and dedicate the resulting merit to it. There was another infant soul nearby constantly calling for its mother. I asked the Magistrate how an unborn infant soul could already call out for its mother. The Magistrate said that children in the human world learn to speak only after reaching one year of age, but these infant souls are no longer in the human realm — they dwell in the netherworld. They exist as souls endowed with spiritual powers, able to communicate through thought and consciousness. In short, the infant souls here endure immense suffering and cry incessantly. Alas! Heaven cherishes all living beings. We must never slay innocent young lives out of selfish desires.

The Magistrate informed me that this Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead is a newly constructed realm. Even as we spoke, streams of infant souls continued pouring in, their numbers truly staggering.

At that moment, I spotted a large group of infant souls flying out with yellow paper in their hands. While I was puzzled, the Magistrate explained that these slips are official warrants ratified

by Yama King. With this token, nether attendants grant them leave to venture into the mortal world to seek out their parents. Most often, they attach themselves to their mothers, inflicting bodily discomfort. Their exact point of attachment depends entirely on the infant soul's likes. Some reattach within the mother's womb, others cling to the chest, while many trail persistently after either parent, robbing them of rest. In short, they stir up troubles relentlessly. If other children are born into the household, these wronged souls will sabotage familial harmony — hitting younger siblings or orchestrating endless nuisances to vent their seething resentment toward their parents.

To the right stands an older city erected seventy years ago, known as the City of Blood Defilement. It is no longer large enough. The infant souls here seemed especially lonely. The Magistrate explained that this zone houses souls from unintentional abortions. That explained their solitary, mournful weeping.

The Magistrate added that seventy years ago, intentional abortion was rare. Most infant souls back then were those who lacked sufficient blessings to complete gestation. In stark contrast, modern mortal society sees rampant intentional abortion. Consuming contraceptive pills after intercourse in the mortal world also constitutes the karma of killing. Countless infant souls enter the womb through conception, only to lose their lives due to emergency contraception.

The Magistrate continued: "Every single day, hordes of aborted souls arrive in the netherworld, ninety percent of these abortions resulting from sexual misconduct. This compounds the grave karmic sin of killing. When sexual misconduct combines with killing, it accumulates collective evil karmas. Once this karmic force disrupts the balance between heaven and earth, catastrophic disasters will descend upon the mortal world, stirred by all this pent-up resentment. These souls seek release, and great catastrophes serve as a channel for this heavy evil karma to

dissipate. Ayù! Return quickly and warn sentient beings in the mortal world of the retribution for abortion!"

"Indeed! Thank you for your guidance today, Magistrate."

I pressed my palms together toward the Magistrate and returned by white lotus flower.

Now, I, Ayù, wish to share excerpts from Volume 56 of The Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra, Chapter 14, Part One: The Buddha's Discourse on Entering the Womb. The Buddha taught: "According to the karma of past lives that determines where rebirth shall occur, the intermediate being takes form matching its next life realm. Intermediate beings destined for rebirth as heavenly beings have their heads facing upward; intermediate beings destined for rebirth as humans, animals or ghosts travel horizontally; intermediate beings bound for the hells have their heads facing straight downward. All intermediate beings possess spiritual powers, traversing through space. Like beings endowed with the heaven eye, they can see far-off places of rebirth." "Only when parents and the child share mutually attracting karmic affinities may the intermediate being enter the mother's womb. Furthermore, when the intermediate being is about to enter the maternal womb, its mind becomes inverted. If the future child is male, it develops affection for the mother and aversion toward the father. If female, it develops affection for the father and aversion toward the mother."

Every life comes into being only after forming complete karmic affinities with both parents; no being enters a womb without affinity. When such affinity manifests, it ought to be cherished. Whether these karmic ties are good or bad, when conditions converge, each person must reap their own karmic fruits. May all sentient beings who have undergone abortion sincerely repent, recite the Buddha's name and transfer the meritorious virtues to these pitiful infant souls. May they attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land at the earliest opportunity, liberated from all suffering!

21 / The Accusations of Infant Souls — King Yama's Yellow Warrant Token

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"Amitabha!"I, Ayù, pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate.

The Magistrate was handling cases of infant souls confined in the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead. I heard a female infant soul screaming loudly: "I hate you two, hate you to the core! I will never let you off. You shall never die a peaceful death, lifetime after lifetime. I will never forgive you, and I will come back to avenge myself without fail." She kept crying out in agony. I was astonished that such a small infant soul held such immense resentment. This female soul looked a little bigger than the rest. The Magistrate told me she was more than six months into gestation when she was aborted. Her parents had decided to terminate the pregnancy after finding out she was a girl. This was the second time this female soul had suffered an abortion. Both terminations had occurred more than six months into pregnancy. Tormented by this repeated calamity, she had brought a complaint before Yama King of the Netherworld. Yama King had permitted her to enter the womb again to collect the debt owed to her.

I went over to speak with the female infant soul. I uttered "*Amitabha*" to the spirit and asked why she harbored such bitter hatred for her parents. I advised her to release the enmity. Seeing that they did not want a daughter, they would not treat her well even if she were reborn to them; there was no need to cling to this hatred.

At my words, the female infant soul burst into violent weeping. She insisted that she would pursue this revenge to the ends of the earth and never pardon the couple who had aborted her.

Overcome with anguish and rage, she recounted that this pair of parents had murdered her twice. During the second abortion, even the doctor had warned that it would be dangerous. Yet her parents said that protecting the mother's safety was what mattered most, and they wanted nothing of the child. They asked for the method most favorable to the mother.

The female soul sobbed that inside her mother's womb, she had kicked with all her strength, hoping to come out earlier. But the doctor held her head down and gave her an injection. All at once, she felt dizzy, achy and powerless all over. Afterwards, the doctor cut her right hand into two pieces and pulled them out with forceps. Then her legs were sliced into four parts and drawn out using suction cups. She suffered unbearable agony and piercing cold, and the rest of her body underwent the same torment.

The female soul continued crying: "My head, my ears and my eyes were cut off piece by piece. Cutting the head hurt the most. The doctor sliced my head many times, hooked me out with a sharp blade-shaped hook, and clamped me with forceps. Every cut brought excruciating pain. I had no strength left to resist, and blood flowed nonstop. I shall never, never forget that suffering. The doctor who performed this abortion lacked experience. Her movements were slower than the previous doctor's, and she made mistakes. Fewer cuts would have sufficed, yet her clumsy errors required extra instruments that intensified my agony — curette style agitators, suction cups, hooks, all used far more often than before. All this suffering came about simply because they did not want me. I will not seek vengeance against the doctor, for she suggested letting me be born, but they refused. They deprived me of seeing the light of day. It is their fault. They wished me dead time and again. I hate them both endlessly. I curse them to suffer miserable fates forever; I will never let them go." Another wave of tormented wailing followed. Alas! She harbored such intense resentment and desire for retaliation. It seemed the expectant

parents needed to engage in profound repentance. After all, what difference does it make whether a child is a boy or a girl?

The Magistrate said: "Yama King has granted this female infant soul permission to reincarnate once again into the household of these very same parents to exact karmic retribution. This time, the spirit will dwell within her mother's womb while holding the yellow warrant token. When she fully assumes human form, the yellow token will lie directly over her genital region, misleading physicians into mistaking her for a male fetus. Throughout the pregnancy, she will receive devoted care and eager anticipation from both parents. Inevitably, they will be disappointed at her birth to find she is a girl—this is King Yama's decree. These parents have failed to abide by moral duties, violated nether laws, and committed the crime of murder. The couple originally enjoyed considerable family blessings and good fortune, yet their two acts of abortion have reduced their blessings and shortened their lifespans across the board. In time, they must also endure the karmic repercussions of this daughter's unfilial conduct toward them in this new life. It is not that Yama King has sentenced these parents to future suffering; their hardship arises solely from their violation of the universal law forbidding killing. Had they given birth to the child during the first pregnancy, their blessings and longevity would have remained intact. One reaps exactly what one sows. To slay any sentient being dooms the perpetrator to future karmic consequences: being killed by others, having a short life, and often falling ill. No matter how rapidly human technology advances, the three foundational laws of yin virtue will never change: saving lives, safeguarding widows' chastity, and performing anonymous acts of supreme kindness. The eternal moral ethics of heaven, earth, and humanity are immutable. Every living being holds an inherent right to survive. Countless infant souls arrive in the netherworld each day, victims of deliberate human abortions. Nether law imposes severe punishment on those who commit such homicides. Even those who urge others to

have abortions shall suffer depleted blessings and a shortened lifespan—all the more so those who have abortions themselves. Conversely, those who persuade others to spare unborn lives may gain blessings and longevity. The nether authorities will record a substantial hidden merit on their personal Registers of Life and Death, benefiting both themselves and others."

The Magistrate went on to instruct Ayù: "Mortal people in the present age have largely lost an understanding of karma. Many falsely believe that unborn fetuses lack consciousness. In truth, once a life is conceived, it is like a human being, although still very fragile. It has memories and can feel pain. In particular, infant souls that have taken human form feel pain more strongly than those conceived only a month earlier, and so on. Ayù, listen to the grievances of the infant souls within the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead, and you will understand that the gynecological illnesses, back pain, headaches and other persistent bodily ailments of mothers who have had abortions are all connected to these wronged infant souls."

I gazed upon the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead. It stretched on for an unimaginable expanse, its boundaries far beyond the scope of my sight. Unending, deafening wails of infant souls echoed throughout the city, and their suffering was heart-wrenching beyond measure.

Before departing, I resolved to visit the female infant soul soon to be reincarnated. "*Amitabha*! Little sister, cease your weeping. When you are reborn, you must practice filial piety toward your parents. Your mother will endure ten arduous months of pregnancy to carry you. Moreover, cycles of vengeance perpetuate endless strife. Yama King has bestowed this warrant token upon you, ensuring that this time you will not suffer abortion again. Let go of your desire for revenge." At my words, the infant soul flared with rage: "Impossible. I will never pardon them."

I said: "Consider this. Without King Yama's warrant token, there is no knowing how much longer you might have had to wait

to be reborn. You ought to be grateful to Yama King." Her tears subsided upon hearing this, seemingly acknowledging her debt of gratitude toward the King. I urged her to honor his benevolence. She conceded she would thank Yama King, yet insisted she would still exact retribution against her parents.

"Farewell, little sister. *Amitabha*! May no further misfortune befall you; take care."

I pressed my palms together toward the Magistrate. "My deepest gratitude, Magistrate."

I took my leave for that day, riding a white lotus flower back to the human realm.

22 / Karmic Retribution for Abortion Doctors in This Life and Future Lives — Incarceration in the Shattering Hell for One Hundred Thousand Years

Newspapers in my city frequently carry reports: teenage girls collapse at home after abortions and must be rushed to hospitals by ambulances; some kill their newborn babies and discard the bodies; others hurl their infants from buildings twenty to thirty stories high. Such acts are utterly outrageous. The root cause lies in the corrupted social atmosphere today. As you can see, immoral advertisements pervade every corner of society. Even wristwatch commercials feature women in revealing low-cut outfits, paired with slogans like “Don’t care for everlasting love, only cherish the moment.” Ads for lingerie and weight-loss products are even more indecent. Countless images and video commercials indulge carnal desires to numb people’s minds. Meanwhile, media outlets constantly expose celebrities’ promiscuous private lives, rampant sexual indulgence and extramarital affairs, dragging down public moral standards. These vulgar, sensationalized ads mislead young people, making them believe indulgence and extravagance represent fashion. As a result, adolescents lack proper sexual education yet act recklessly and promiscuously, which is essentially the degeneration of spiritual nature.

Fueled by such negative media content, abortions grow increasingly prevalent and spawn numerous social troubles, unrecognized and ignored by most people. It is known that Japan houses no fewer than two thousand temples built exclusively to shelter infant souls, evidence of its staggering abortion figures. In

Taiwan, an estimated three hundred thousand abortions occurred in 1997, four hundred thousand in 1999, and five hundred thousand in 2000. These figures are merely extrapolated from sampling, and the actual numbers remain undisclosed to the public.

Studies conducted in Minnesota, USA show that teenage girls who have abortions are ten times more likely to commit suicide within six months than those who do not. Other relevant research also indicates that teenage girls with a history of multiple abortions face higher risks of suicide and mental disorders within half a year after an abortion.

Let us turn to the karmic retributions of killing as recorded in Buddhist sutras, which are documented in numerous texts. The Upasaka Precept Sutra states: “All sentient beings who commit killing suffer present-life karmic fruits: an ugly appearance, weak vitality, ill repute, a short lifespan, dwindling wealth, separation from family and kin, reproach by virtuous sages, distrust from others, and undeserved misfortunes brought on by others’ wrongdoings. These are the adverse karmic fruits endured in the current lifetime. Furthermore, after shedding their human bodies, those who take lives fall into the hell realms to endure immense torment. They suffer unending hunger and thirst yet linger for extremely long ages, cursed with hideous forms, feeble strength and shameful renown. These are the evil karmic retributions awaiting them in the afterlife. Should such killers attain a human rebirth in the future, they will again receive ugly features, short lives and poverty as karmic consequences. Through the karmic force of this single evil person’s deeds, all grains, fruits and melons across the land will grow scarce, and misfortune shall spread to the entire under-heaven.”

Let us read what the Buddha taught in the Brahmajala Sutra: “All men have been my fathers, and all women have been my mothers. In every lifetime, I have received rebirth through them.”

The Buddha said: “Disciples of the Buddha, you must not take life deliberately in any way—whether you kill personally, incite others to kill, facilitate killing, praise killing, rejoice upon seeing others kill, or slay beings through mantras; this encompasses the cause of killing, the condition of killing, the method of killing and the karma of killing. Never intentionally slay any sentient being endowed with life. Bodhisattvas ought to produce the permanently dwelling mind of kindness and compassion, together with the mind of filial piety and obedience, devising all manner of expedient means to rescue and protect every sentient being. Should there be people who indulge their unrestrained minds and take delight in killing, they commit the Bodhisattva Parajika offense.” The Buddha has expounded at length upon the hellish karmic retributions for killing in numerous sutras. Now I journeyed to the Netherworld to ask the Magistrate what punishment awaits doctors who perform abortions for others.

“May the Buddha’s power shelter me!” I set forth riding on the white lotus flower.

“Amitabha!”I, Ayù, pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. Today I wish to ask the Magistrate about the karmic retribution for doctors who perform abortions for others.

The Magistrate replied, “Seventy years ago, physicians who performed abortions would be confined for 1000 years in each of the following hells: the Howling Hell, Sword Leaf Hell, Heart Piercing Hell, Ice Hell, and Eye Piercing Hell. They could not escape hellish torment until every harmed infant soul successfully attained human rebirth. The state of their spiritual recovery would then determine when they could be reborn as humans. Upon being reborn as humans, such doctors would have short lives and often fall ill. Common afflictions included numbness in the shoulders, neck, limbs and hands, nervous disorders, headaches, lower back soreness, epilepsy, chronic rhinitis, all manner of gynecological ailments, inability to consummate marriage, breast cancer, uterine cancer, nocturia, and countless

other illnesses too many to list. In short, every agony the doctor had inflicted on infant souls would return to them as bodily suffering in their human reincarnation. No medicine in the human realm could cure these ailments; they would only fade once the corresponding karmic debt was erased. Such was the retribution for abortion doctors seventy years ago.

"Nowadays, abortion doctors in the mortal world suffer a depletion of blessings and lifespan in this lifetime. Their family fortune, career prospects and financial luck all diminish. The earliest symptoms they develop include headaches, lower back pain, shoulder pain and hand pain. After they pass away, they will first endure karmic punishment in the Shattering Hell for one hundred thousand years, and then undergo punishment in each of the aforementioned hells. Modern abortion practitioners take many lives every day. Furthermore, the surgical tools they use inflict greater harm and lasting trauma on infant spirits than those caused by older instruments, and hence the evil karma created by modern abortion doctors is heavier.

"There are also many cases in which would-be parents encounter spirit-related disturbances because the infant souls become resentful after abortion. The infant souls you saw holding yellow warrant tokens were going out to seek revenge on their would-be parents. These are the so-called spirit-related disturbances. The resulting misfortunes range widely. Milder cases involve possession, prolonged illness and taking medicine; in severe cases, their very lives are placed in jeopardy. Many aborted infant souls are in fact ancestral kin of these parents reincarnated into human life.

"Ayù, go witness the Shattering Hell now. Return and record its horrors in full to warn the people in the mortal world."

"Yes! Thank you, Magistrate!" I immediately arrived at the Shattering Hell.

I noticed a consistent trait shared by all hells: deafening wails and moans of agony can be heard long before entering the gates,

an eternal hallmark of hellish realms. It is no exaggeration that hell is the ultimate place of suffering—one must never fall here.

I watched as female souls were herded by ferocious yakshas toward tiny, round, red iron cavities reeking of putrid stench, one spirit per cavity. The holes were far too narrow to fit their forms. The souls turned to flee, yet to no avail. The savage yakshas roared, skewering the souls with sharp pitchforks and forcing them brutally inside. The souls' bodies gushed blood, their limbs snapping, until they were crammed fully into the iron pits. The yakshas waved fans over each cavity, instantly restoring the souls' broken bodies unharmed. Then they dragged the souls out with sharp hooked blades, drawing shrill screams of unbearable pain. Next, the yakshas took shears and cut the souls' flesh piece by piece, covering the ground in pools of blood. Once every fragment of the body was severed, suction devices pulled the pieces back together to resurrect the spirit. The cycle of agonizing torture repeated endlessly. The sight was unspeakably horrific; I could bear to watch no longer. *Amitabha*! Never commit deeds that harm others, for this torment is hundreds and thousands of times more agonizing than mortal childbirth.

After thanking the Magistrate for his efforts and pressing my palms together, I returned by white lotus flower.

23 / Do Not Weep, Little One — The Magistrate Elaborates on Remedial Practices for Abortion

Grateful for the Buddha's supporting empowerment, I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"Amitabha!"I, Ayù, prostrated to the Magistrate. Today I wished to ask the Magistrate: "What can be done to make amends after abortion, and how do you view this question of making amends?"

The Magistrate replied, "No matter what reason drives mortal parents to terminate a pregnancy, once the abortion is carried out, they incur the complete karmic offense of taking a life. The Netherworld's Register of Life and Death shall record this transgression: on a specific year and month, certain individuals slew an unborn infant soul. By virtue of this entry, those who procured an abortion will be tried and punished in the Main Hall of the Netherworld once their mortal lives end." If the abortion occurs solely because the infant soul seeking rebirth lacks sufficient meritorious blessings, the infant's parents will not be condemned to suffer in hell after their passing. Even so, these parents must still repent for their own karma and insufficient blessings that prevented the infant from being successfully born into the mortal world. They must repent and dedicate merit to the infant soul, and earnestly pray that the infant soul may soon transcend suffering and attain rebirth on virtuous paths. Every single occurrence in existence is bound together by intertwined cause and effect. For an infant soul to enter its mother's womb, countless intricate karmic connections of good and evil deeds forged across countless past lifetimes tie the spirit to its destined parents. If the spirit perishes midway through gestation, this is fixed karma that cannot be changed under nether law. Such

misfortune arises because both the infant soul and its parents committed harmful transgressions such as killing, theft, and sexual misconduct in their previous incarnations.

"Abortion brings suffering to infant souls. In most cases, the exact amount of agony endured by the infant soul will be inflicted back upon its expectant parents in the future. There are two additional factors that double the duration of their karmic punishment these expectant parents must undergo. First, if a long time has elapsed since the abortion, the punishment period must be doubled. The elapsed time is counted from the date of the abortion. If the expectant parents remain unrepentant, act as though nothing happened and refuse to believe in the cycle of karmic cause and retribution, the infant soul will weep, suffer and seethe with resentment all alone in the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead within the Netherworld. Its torment continues, and its accumulated grievances grow deeper and more entrenched with every passing day. Some expectant parents in the mortal world possess abundant meritorious blessings, which temporarily delay the karmic retribution for the abortion offense. They will only receive their due punishment once all their worldly merits are fully exhausted; for some expectant parents, this karmic reckoning may not arrive until their next lifetime. In such instances, the infant soul is forced to endure prolonged suffering over a longer span of time. Yet the causal laws of the netherworld will never grow confused, no matter how many years or generations pass, nor how drastically the expectant parents' physical appearances shift across reincarnations. Retribution is never absent; it merely awaits its destined hour. The karmic law of cause and effect operates with perfect precision, without the slightest margin of error. All karmic forces accumulated over these extended periods will inevitably rebound fully upon the expectant parents who committed the abortion. Therefore, all expectant parents who have terminated a pregnancy must generate sincere repentance at the earliest possible time,

earnestly facing and resolving this karmic transgression. If they fail to do so, no such parent can escape the karmic penalty of debt collection from the aggrieved infant soul, nor evade the unsparing retribution laid down by the Netherworld's immutable laws.

"Second, if the infant soul in question bears an extremely obsessive attachment, the punishment period for the parents who terminated its pregnancy will inevitably be doubled. Among the expectant parents in the mortal world who have an abortion, the mother bears heavier karmic retribution, for she is the one who ultimately decides to proceed with the abortion. Many mortal mothers resolve to stop the abortion at the very last moment. Such mothers accumulate virtuous merit for saving a life. Most infant souls with obsessive attachments come into rebirth as karmic creditors to their expectant parents, yet they tragically suffer the cruel fate of being aborted once more. Thus, they forge profound evil karmic bonds with the parents who carry them. These sentient beings already harbored profound resentment before entering the womb; compounded by the agony and hatred inflicted by abortion, their malevolent karmic ties grow impossibly entrenched. As a result, when their karmic retribution arrives, the parents' term of punishment must be doubled.

"There are two ways to remedy the karmic offense of abortion. The first relies on internal spiritual power: resolving the enmity with the infant soul through wholehearted, sincere repentance. The second depends on external good deeds: accumulating blessings and practicing good deeds to gradually ease the infant soul's resentment toward its parents over the abortion. These are the only two ways to make amends after abortion. The length of time required to resolve each abortion karmic case varies widely and cannot be generalized. Naturally, parents who have undergone multiple abortions need relatively longer to resolve their karmic debts, for every abortion weaves another malevolent karmic bond with an infant soul. The depth of these negative bonds depends on whether the past-life karmic connection

between the parents and that infant soul was virtuous or malicious. If the original bond is virtuous and the infant soul came to repay kindness, future troubles will be comparatively mild. Even so, the abortion inflicts agony on the spirit, twisting their originally benevolent karmic bond into a malicious one. If the infant soul arrives out of negative karma to claim karmic debts from its parents, abortion will only worsen their already fraught relationship and deepen their resentment. Every abortion inflicts immense suffering on the infant soul, and the intensity of that torment differs from case to case. Generally speaking, suffering grows alongside the size of the fetus: the larger the fetus, the greater its pain, and the more intense its lingering resentment.

"The karmic force stemming from abortion arises from multiple factors. Most abortions of infant souls nowadays result from sexual misconduct, which constitutes a grave concern. Many parties bear karmic retribution in hell for the deed of abortion: the expectant parents, attending physicians, and anyone who urges someone to have an abortion that is then carried out. Each time a person facilitates an abortion that destroys an infant soul, the severity of their subsequent retribution hinges on how profound the infant soul's resentment and obsessive attachment are. Regardless of how heavy or light their ensuing retribution may be, a malevolent karmic bond has already been forged between them and the infant soul. As the saying goes, only the person who tied the bell on the tiger can untie it—those who created the karmic debt alone can resolve it. No matter what circumstances led to the abortion, the expectant parents in the mortal world must cultivate profound remorse and shame. After the abortion takes place, they ought to sincerely repent to the infant soul each day and beg for its forgiveness, so as to gradually soften the infant soul's lingering resentment. As ethereal beings, infant souls possess telepathic powers and can know the thoughts of their expectant parents. Hence all parents who have aborted a child must repent with genuine sincerity. Ritualized, formulaic

repentance without true remorse is utterly ineffective. Therefore, these parents must offer earnest, heartfelt repentance every single day. When they first begin repenting, they may experience various physical discomforts. The most common symptoms include headaches, chest pains, soreness in hands and feet, lower back aches, emotional distress, and many other afflictions too numerous to list, which vary from person to person. A small number of expectant parents will endure exceptional bodily agony, the severity of which depends on their karmic connection with the infant soul. Almost all parents who have had an abortion will feel such painful sensations; some will go through every single discomfort mentioned above. There is another group of parents whose abortion karma is not very grave, as their abortion was unintentional and resulted solely from the fetus lacking enough blessings to incarnate in the mortal world. Such parents fare comparatively better, yet they still need to repent sincerely so the infant soul can transcend promptly and be reborn on virtuous paths.

"After being aborted, infant souls are confined to the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead in the Netherworld, where they grieve and seethe with anger, waiting for Yama the King of Hell to pass judgment and issue yellow warrant tokens of the nether court. Once these tokens are granted, the infant souls are permitted to travel to the mortal world to claim karmic retribution from their parents. At that time, the expectant parents' earthly fortunes will decline across the board: obstacles will plague their careers, work, physical health, interpersonal relationships, and every aspect of life. This is also because so many expectant parents in the mortal world have abortions each day, giving rise to many illnesses in the mortal world. Examples include intractable migraines, stubborn gynecological disorders, sexually transmitted ailments, psychosis and other mental disturbances, all of which stem from the karmic offense of abortion. Such illnesses can only be resolved through the patient's sincere repentance and consistent accumulation of

merits via virtuous deeds. Otherwise, treating such illnesses amounts to a waste of money, time, and medicinal resources. Some sufferers may never find relief in this lifetime, their unresolved karmic suffering lingering to continuously manifest in their next reincarnation. This must be remedied at the level of thought, for every thought a being produces bears great significance. A single mental intention can transcend time and space to ripen good or evil karmic fruits. Bear this firmly in mind: parents who have aborted a child must repent personally; it is futile to merely pay others to recite sutras and repent on their behalf. Many venues exist in the mortal world for appeasing infant souls, yet the majority of these places yield no real spiritual benefit and only lead people to waste their money in vain.

"Parents who have terminated pregnancies should sincerely repent to the infant souls every day on one hand, and personally recite The Sutra of the Original Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva or other Buddhist sutras on the other. Those who are able should perform more life release and dedicate the merits gained to the infant souls. Abortion constitutes the act of taking life, which inevitably accumulates unwholesome karma and invites suffering. Every expectant mother who has had an abortion feels an unexplained sense of guilt stemming directly from the karmic weight of abortion. Only sincere repentance and forgiveness from the infant soul can dispel such guilt. Some mothers may claim they feel no remorse, yet this is merely because their afflictions and habitual tendencies are extremely heavy; in other words, thick karmic obstacles cloud their perceptions. Life release attracts auspiciousness by saving the lives of other sentient beings. The creatures freed feel joy and gratitude, and this practice also allows expectant mothers to forge virtuous karmic connections with the beings released. Therefore, such parents ought to release lives frequently and transfer the meritorious virtues accrued therefrom to infant souls, so that these souls can swiftly escape suffering, attain bliss, and be reborn in pure lands.

"The Netherworld attaches great importance to remedies for the karma of abortion. The human realm has now fallen into an era rampant with unchaste sexual misconduct. As a lingering consequence of such transgressions, abortion has become commonplace among young people. The pervasive foul energy spawned by worldly sexual immorality, paired with the thick resentment of aborted infant souls permeating the mortal world, gravely disrupts the balance of nature and will inevitably draw forth natural disasters and man-made catastrophes.

"The King of the Nether Court has issued a decree: mortal beings who sincerely repent and resolve their abortion karmic debts, vow never to commit abortion again, and spread this teaching to dissuade others from terminating pregnancies may atone for their crimes through meritorious deeds. A great virtuous merit will be recorded beside their names in their personal Register of Life and Death, and the hell punishments owed for their abortion offense may be reduced or waived at the court's discretion. The final ruling for each person shall be determined on a case-by-case basis."

"That will be all for today, Ayù. Hurry back and compose the writings!"

"*Amitabha*!" Having prostrated in gratitude to the Magistrate, I departed riding a white lotus flower for home.

24 / My Child, Mother Loves You! — The Magistrate's Earnest Teachings to All Mothers in the Mortal World

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"Amitabha!"I, Ayù, pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate.

The Magistrate said, "Ayù, it has been quite some time since your last visit."

"Yes, I am filled with remorse, for secular duties have kept me occupied lately. I wish to learn from your dedication to serving all beings day and night, and I shall come more often from now on." Today Ayù wished to ask the Magistrate several questions regarding aborted infant souls.

"May I ask you, Magistrate: When those mothers who have had abortions in the mortal world dedicate the meritorious virtues they gain from reciting sutras and releasing living beings to their infant souls, can those infant souls trapped in the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead receive them? Which sutras yield the greatest efficacy when recited by people in the mortal world? How many rounds of sutra recitation are required to take effect? Where will the infant souls go after receiving the transferred meritorious virtues? Should people in the mortal world erect spirit tablets for the infant souls in their homes or Buddhist shrines, so the infant souls may receive incense offerings and listen to sutra recitations? Does such practice bear real merit? Do infant souls grow within the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead, and what sustains them there?"

The Magistrate replied: "Yes, the infant souls can indeed receive the transferred meritorious virtues. We distribute

meritorious virtues to infant souls in accordance with the dedicated virtuous deeds designated for the infant souls by their expectant parents and relatives. All virtuous acts such as animal liberation, sutra recitation, Buddha offerings, almsgiving, bridge construction, and road-paving generate karmic merits. If the expectant parents accumulate abundant merits through good deeds, a greater portion will be allocated to the infant souls; those who generate scant merits shall pass only a small share to these aborted infant souls. The magnitude of meritorious virtues derived from each virtuous act hinges entirely on the practitioner's original intention when performing it. If one acts virtuously solely to liberate suffering sentient beings, without the slightest desire for repayment, and remains unattached to the deed after completing it, such practitioners naturally attain boundless, immense meritorious virtues without deliberate pursuit. If they dedicate such immeasurable meritorious virtues to infant souls in the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead, those infant souls will transcend to wholesome realms within forty-nine days after being aborted. As for the allocation of meritorious virtues: for every seven portions of meritorious virtues accumulated by the practitioner in the mortal world, six portions remain with the mortal practitioner, while one portion is granted to the infant soul in the Netherworld.

"The Earth Store Sutra is the most suitable sutra to recite to help departed souls attain transcendence. Earth Store Bodhisattva holds boundless kindness and compassion and once uttered a great vow: 'I shall not attain Buddhahood until all hell realms are emptied.' This Bodhisattva has the closest karmic affinity with beings in the hells. This sutra must be recited in full at least forty-nine times. The fastest case of transcendence in our netherworld records involved a mortal mother who had an abortion. She recited the Earth Store Sutra forty-nine times, constantly made great vows and practiced good deeds, and her infant soul attained transcendence. The infant soul attained transcendence on the

forty-ninth day, counting from the first day of the abortion. Such mothers among mortals are extremely rare — scarcely one in ten thousand. Later, this mother grew into a pure cultivator who benefits both herself and all living beings. Sadly, such mothers are extraordinarily rare among mortal beings in the world, scarcely one in ten thousand. Nearly all infant souls arriving at the netherworld today remain unclaimed. Very few parents who have had abortions sincerely resolve to repent. Many people believe that if they cannot see it, nothing is wrong, but this is mistaken. Every single day, these infant souls trapped in the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead endure unceasing agony. If their parents in the human world refuse to sincerely untie the karmic enmity binding them to the souls, resentment will only deepen and intensify as time passes. Once the parents in the human world exhaust all their blessings, the karmic conditions will ripen, and the aggrieved infant soul will come to exact retribution without fail. Nor can they escape the netherworld's laws. Then their days of sweetness will end and suffering will begin; the forms that retribution may take are too many to recount. They may suffer every manner of bodily ailment from head to toe, and may even face the ruin of their families and the loss of lives.

"The amount of meritorious virtue each infant soul requires varies, for every case carries distinct karmic ties of kindness and resentment, which means the time needed to resolve the bond will differ accordingly. If the spirit incarnating into the womb comes to repay past kindness, the situation will be comparatively mild. Even so, the trauma of abortion plants fresh resentment within it, tangling the original virtuous and hostile karmic ties between the infant soul and its prospective parents. We constantly risk creating such new karmic entanglements through our actions. If the soul arrives to settle old karmic grievances, the abortion will only compound their strife, bringing unendurable suffering for all parties.

"Once infant souls receive transferred meritorious virtues, they will ascend and leave the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead in the Netherworld in accordance with their own karmic forces. There are roughly three destinations for their transcendence: First, those endowed with sufficient blessings can rely on such meritorious virtues to ascend to the Western Pure Land. Very few infant souls manage to attain this level of transcendence, however. Second, some infant souls ascend to the heaven realms and become celestial beings. Third, others are reborn back into the mortal world. Whether they ascend to the Western Pure Land, heaven realms, or the human realm, the rank of rebirth is determined by the infant soul's own blessing reward. Within the Western Pure Land exist nine grades of lotus flowers; the heaven realms fall into three divisions: the desire realm, the form realm and the formless realm; and the mortal world is marked by disparities between wealth, nobility, poverty and lowliness. Where exactly an infant soul departs for after receiving meritorious virtues hinges on whether the expectant parents who had the abortion can generate enough meritorious virtues to dedicate to the infant soul and facilitate its transcendence. The sooner the infant soul transcends, the sooner the parents in the mortal world can be freed from their disasters. I sincerely wish all parents in the mortal world who have had abortions would swiftly cultivate genuine remorse for the hell-bound negative karma created by abortion, practice goodness, accumulate virtue, and deliver their poor, flesh-and-blood infant souls trapped within the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead.

"When it comes to setting up tablets for infant souls, the expectant parents in the mortal world need not place such tablets at home. This will only delay the infant souls' transcendence, and may even attract other wandering souls to dwell on the tablets. As for erecting memorial tablets in a Buddha hall so the infant souls may receive incense offerings and listen to sutra recitations, this will certainly be effective, but only if the Buddha hall is pure and

all rituals are carried out in accordance with dharma principles. Only under such conditions can it bring about the effect of transcendence. Nowadays many venues in the mortal world claim to be authentic Buddha halls, boasting highly spiritually attuned masters who specialize in liberating infant souls. Yet their actual deeds are merely schemes to swindle money. Those who entrust them will waste their money, time and energy, and may even be possessed by demons and evil entities. The infant souls from abortions hold resentment solely toward their expectant parents. The initiator of the trouble alone can resolve it. Instead of paying others to repent to the infant souls on their behalf, the expectant parents should offer sincere repentance themselves, which yields faster and better results.

"When aborted infant souls arrive at the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead, most take the form of approximately six-month-old mortal infants and retain this shape until they are reborn or transcend. Infant souls in the Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead subsist on contact food. If their expectant parents in the mortal world make offerings to them, the infant souls can absorb the essence of the food. Tragically, these abandoned infant souls receive no offerings at all and live in unending agony, wailing bitterly each day. The infant souls' lingering resentment quietly drains their parents' blessings and virtues day by day. When these mortal parents pass away, they will be trapped in another painful cycle of karmic grudges. Therefore, I urge all mortal beings never to commit abortion. Anyone who has had an abortion must practice goodness and accumulate virtue to atone for misdeeds through virtuous works. Those who spread these messages of the nether karmic laws and lead wrongdoers to sincere repentance may have their offenses lessened by the nether authorities."

After joining my palms in gratitude to the Magistrate, I returned by white lotus flower.

25 / Views on Female Chastity and Premarital Sex According to Netherworld Laws

“Amitabha!”I, Ayù, pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. Today I wished to ask how the netherworld views female chastity and premarital sexual conduct.

The Magistrate replied, “Women ought to uphold the three obediences and four virtues. The virtue spoken of here refers to chastity. If a woman loses her spouse or goes through a divorce, yet resolves to remain single for the rest of her life, preserving her chastity until her passing, the netherworld will record a meritorious merit of safeguarding chastity in her Register of Life and Death. Provided she commits no major transgressions in the mortal world, she may ascend to heavenly realms after passing away, or receive blessings such as being reborn as a male. By contrast, women who abandon chastity will suffer depleted blessings and shortened lifespans while alive, and set harmful examples for their descendants. Regrettably, chastity is no longer valued among modern women.

“Contemporary society suffers from a grave lack of teachings on karmic cause and effect, as well as traditional moral education upheld in ancient times. In ancient times, women abided by the three obediences and four virtues, emphasizing womanly virtue, womanly speech, womanly work and womanly appearance. Back then, even women’s gait, bearing and tone of voice were subject to norms. Today’s women are no longer confined within the household. Most join the workforce, holding advanced academic credentials and demonstrating strong professional competence; some even outperform men in various fields. The old adage that an uneducated woman is virtuous no longer holds true. Lacking

sufficient moral cultivation, many modern women are influenced by televisions and online media amid technological advancement, growing indifferent to chastity.

"Women must conduct themselves prudently. When their romantic circumstances change, they must reflect deeply on themselves and refrain from improper conduct. The loss of chastity constitutes sexual misconduct. Such misconduct plants boundless karmic seeds destined to bring suffering in the hell realms. It is my sincere wish that all women across the world may safeguard their chastity.

"Premarital sexual acts severely tarnish the radiance of one's spiritual nature. At birth, every soul carries a radiant spiritual light in their virgin state, albeit with varying degrees of brightness. Gradually tainted by mortal worldly influences, this radiance fades, and may even turn murky. Once the spirit dims, misfortunes will befall the individual. Nevertheless, some people can, through spiritual practice, restore a dimmed spiritual nature to its original brightness within their lifetimes.

"Marriage exists primarily to grant humans the means to continue their lineage. Sexual relations within the bounds of human ethics serve for procreation. Even within marriage, sexual activity must not be excessive; otherwise, one's blessings and lifespan will be diminished. From the perspective of the nether laws, people must strictly abide by the rule prohibiting premarital sexual conduct to safeguard personal virtue. Sexual relations ought only to take place after marriage begins on the wedding day. Any sexual intercourse prior to marriage constitutes sexual misconduct. Even if the two parties end up marrying each other later, the pre-marital intimacy still violates the precept against sexual misconduct, depletes one's blessings and shortens one's lifespan. Those engaging in premarital sexual relations with more than one partner of the opposite sex suffer greater loss of blessings, and plant negative karmic seeds that lead to hellish

suffering. The exact consequences depend on each individual case and the specific forms of sexual misconduct committed.

"The moment a person engages in sexual intercourse for the first time before marriage, that is, the moment one loses one's virginity, the inner spiritual radiance within oneself begins to dim. This dimming brings about declines in many aspects of life, including the depletion of blessings, financial fortune and lifespan. Therefore everyone must take heed of this matter. Do not act on momentary romantic desire and impulse casually, squandering the precious human body obtained through rebirth. Many worthwhile undertakings need to be accomplished while one is young.

"Our mental energy and vitality ought to be devoted to meaningful endeavours, instead of being consumed by obsessive romantic attachments. Such indulgence is utterly meaningless, and furthermore sows negative karmic causes that lead to torment in the hells in future retribution."

"Very well! Ayù, let us end here for today. You may return now, and come again another time."

"*Amitabha*! I am grateful for the Magistrate's teachings!"

After joining my palms and bowing to express gratitude, I returned by white lotus flower.

26 / The Mystery of Mortals Struck Dead by Lightning Under Netherworld Laws

“Amitabha!”I, Ayù, pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. Today I wished to ask: “In ancient times there were cases of people being struck dead by lightning for sexual misconduct. Why did this happen, rather than retribution in some other form, such as severe illness?”

The Magistrate explained: “There are two reasons why those committing sexual misconduct were struck dead by lightning in ancient times. First, the netherworld employs lightning as punishment for such offenders to make mortals witness that sexual misconduct can bring a miserable death within one’s lifetime. Visible lightning strikes serve as tangible warnings to all sentient beings, urging mutual vigilance against vice. Second, such wrongdoers harbor overwhelming malicious thoughts and refuse to repent. Their accumulated sexual transgressions and other grave evil karmas draw the retribution of being struck by lightning. After their sudden death, they are condemned to hell to endure torments spanning tens of thousands of kalpas with no release date in sight.

“The God of Thunder is an upright celestial deity tasked with unleashing thunder and lightning during rainfall or foul weather. The number of thunderclaps permitted each time follows precise celestial regulations. No lightning strike death occurs by chance. The God of Thunder always acts upon official written orders from the netherworld, which specify the exact date, time, address, household and individual marked for execution by open-air lightning strike. Generally, before delivering the fatal blow, the God of Thunder first releases peals of thunder, then precisely

extracts the sinful soul and executes it out in the open. Lightning generates blazing fire, so the deity moves the wrongdoer outdoors deliberately to avoid harming innocent bystanders during punishment.

“Many instances of people being struck by lightning in ancient times were carried out as such punishments. In ancient eras, fewer people committed sexual misconduct compared to modern times. A single lightning execution could shake numerous sentient beings, prompting them to engage in self-cultivation and purify their minds. Yet the hearts of people today no longer possess the unsophisticated purity found among humanity in ancient times.

“Licentiousness ranks as chief among all evils; filiality takes precedence among all virtues. Those who indulge in licentiousness suffer diminished blessings and shortened lifespans personally, while gravely corrupting social mores, harming both others and themselves, and such deeds constitute unfilial conduct. Throughout history at home and abroad, countless heroes have had their promising futures ruined by licentiousness.

“Licentiousness drags people down, causes them to lose their mind and nature, and may even lead addicts to death. The nether laws greatly reward filial people yet impose harsh penalties on those guilty of sexual misconduct. I urge everyone to uphold humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness, practice good deeds to accumulate virtues, preserve the radiance of one’s pre-heaven spiritual nature, and refrain from creating evil causes that lead to hellish retribution.”

Having heard the judge’s admonition, I pressed my palms together in gratitude to him, then returned home riding a white lotus flower.

27 / The Destination of Homosexuals — the Great Hell of Connected Thinking

I am endlessly grateful to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for their compassionate deliverance of all beings. Every thought of theirs is devoted to liberating sentient beings. Twenty-four hours had passed in the human realm. Now I rode the white lotus flower and arrived at the hells once again, where Earth Store Bodhisattva was still saving and delivering beings from suffering here. It turned out the Dharma assembly on karmic causes and effects that had begun the day before had not yet ended.

My heart overflowed with joy to behold Earth Store Bodhisattva again! On behalf of all sentient beings throughout the Dharma realm, I prostrated respectfully to Earth Store Bodhisattva. How pure, cool and compassionate was the Bodhisattva's Buddha light that filled the entire void! It reminded me of the words spoken by the Buddha in the Avatamsaka Sutra: "They possess the unobstructed pure kindness of the mortal world, for they radiate boundless light that shines equally on all beings; they possess pure kindness filling the void, for their rescue of sentient beings reaches every corner; they possess pure kindness rooted in Dharma affinities, for they have certified the true Dharma of suchness; they possess unconditioned pure kindness, for they abide in the Bodhisattva nature of non-production and non-extinction; they possess benefit-bringing pure kindness, for every act they perform gladdens all sentient beings. They possess unwearied pure compassion, for they bear sufferings for all beings without weariness; they possess pure compassion manifesting birth amid hardship and adversity, for they do so to liberate sentient beings; they possess pure compassion taking

birth in wholesome realms, for they manifest impermanence; they possess pure compassion for beings bound to wrong destinies, for they never abandon their great vows through countless kalpas. They practice the Bodhisattva path unceasingly, embracing all sentient beings with the heart of great compassion."

Earth Store Bodhisattva embodied unconditional great kindness and same-body great compassion, and there were infinite Dharma voices emanating from the Bodhisattva's pure and compassionate Buddha light. I also aspired to learn from Earth Store Bodhisattva's great compassion and serve all beings. Empowered by Earth Store Bodhisattva's pure, kind and compassionate radiance, the hells were made pure, cool and peaceful.

I intended to explain to everyone that the hells are immensely vast and divided into distinct categories. The hell I was visiting then was the Hell of Sexual Misconduct. This was an overarching designation for one major grand hell, beneath which lay eighteen subsidiary minor hells. The souls detained in these eighteen lesser hells committed different forms of illicit sexual misconduct and therefore received differing karmic retributions. Some souls only committed sexual acts at improper times during their mortal lives (the first and fifteenth days of each lunar month, the six fasting days, birthdays of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, days when celestial deities examine human deeds, daytime, family celebration days, death anniversaries, or times when either partner is ill), in improper locations (anywhere beyond the central area of the marital bed; even if the man stands on the floor beside the bed while the woman lies on its edge, it counts as an improper location, to say nothing of other venues) or with improper parts of the body (all parts other than the female genital tract). Souls guilty solely of these transgressions received the punishment of swallowing iron pellets. In truth, every torture endured within each hell was excruciatingly agonizing.

I paid homage to the Magistrate and wished to ask him about homosexuality. The Magistrate said: “Homosexual relations also constitute the offense of sexual misconduct. After death, such people are sent to the hell of connected thinking within the hell of sexual misconduct to receive punishment for five hundred years. If they have committed other forms of sexual misconduct, they will further undergo retribution in other hells of sexual misconduct in turn.”

At once, the Magistrate led me to the hell of connected thinking. All the male and female souls here endure the same karmic retribution. I noticed the duration of torment inflicted by the human-shaped trees varies among them, and observing further might make the reason clear. Among these souls was one I recognized — BLX, a very famous pop singer. In his lifetime, he had countless male and female fans and held numerous concerts. Now he appeared lost in thought. Presently, a walking human-shaped tree approached. Seeing it, he joyfully took its hand and sought to embrace it intimately. Immediately, the tree’s branches and twigs bound him and struck his head relentlessly. Once he collapsed, bloodied and unconscious, a gust from the tree’s leaves slowly restored his body, and the human-shaped tree departed.

Witnessing this, I asked the Magistrate: “Does the tree’s departure mean their punishment is finished?” The Magistrate replied: “It does not. Homosexuality is a form of mistaken affectionate attachments within one’s thoughts. As you have just seen, all these souls attract the human-shaped tree only after such longing thoughts arise within them. Those whose longing thoughts resurface after longer intervals carry lighter lustful cravings; those whose longing thoughts arise swiftly face heavier retribution.”

I asked: “If condemned souls cease such thoughts entirely, will they no longer suffer punishment?”

The Magistrate answered: “When condemned souls completely abandon these thoughts, they may leave this hell. All their karmic

forces originate from deluded, inverted thoughts. The karmic hell debts of some homosexuals are comparatively lighter. For instance, one born male was repeatedly reborn as a female in past lives. Though endowed with a male body in this lifetime, they have been unable to shift away from a feminine way of thinking in their subconscious. Hence they are not drawn to women and remain attracted to men, just as in former lifetimes. The same principle applies to those born female. This is the primary cause of homosexual attraction and sexual misconduct among mortals in the human world. If such homosexuals commit no other sexual transgressions and merely seek a companion with whom they live, addressing each other as spouses, they will receive punishment in the hell of connected thinking for fifty hell years. Should all karmic seeds of homosexual misconduct be eliminated within those fifty years, they may leave the hell ahead of schedule. If those seeds of homosexual misconduct remain unremoved, an additional thirty years of punishment will be imposed."

Beside the hell of connected thinking stands a great hell, utterly empty. I found this most strange, for every other hell teems with suffering sentient beings. None I had seen had ever been vacant. I questioned the Magistrate: "Why is this hell completely empty?" The Magistrate said: "Some beings in the mortal world are currently developing certain aphrodisiacs. They remain in the research phase, but once completed, these substances will be marketed and sold. This hell is reserved for all who participate in developing these aphrodisiacs, to receive their punishment in the future."

I asked further: "Does this mean merely harboring thoughts that break the precept against sexual misconduct counts as an offense?"

The Magistrate said: "Indeed. Every time such thoughts arise, one's innate vital energy is stirred, and one's upright vitality is already damaged."

I gained profound insights once more today, and gave thanks to the Magistrate!

I prostrated to the Magistrate! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

28 / Paying Homage to Earth Store Bodhisattva at the Hall of Initial Turning of Nether Radiance

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

“Amitabha!”I, Ayù, pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. “Magistrate, how does Earth Store Bodhisattva save beings in hell? May I go and see?”

The Magistrate said, “Earth Store Bodhisattva has been tirelessly saving and taking across suffering sentient beings in the hells every moment without cease. There is a Dharma assembly hall in our nether realm known as the Hall of Initial Turning of Nether Radiance. Earth Store Bodhisattva has been constantly expounding the Dharma and offering teachings to the souls of the netherworld.”

Curious, I asked: “Are sentient beings in hell not engulfed in suffering every instant? How can they find time to listen to the Dharma? Those who have finished enduring their karmic punishments should depart the hells immediately to continue transmigration, should they not?”

The Magistrate replied: “The condemned souls in the hells are fundamentally the same as sentient beings in the human world; all have fallen here through transmigration within the six realms. Some descend from the heaven realm, the asura realm and the human realm; others come here from the three lower paths: the ghost path and animal path. They are of the same mind and nature, endowed with the full radiance of the pre-heaven original nature. Yet, deluded by inverted thoughts, they have lost their mind and nature, committing killings and various transgressions that send them falling into the hells. Every soul shall one day

return to the radiance of its original nature, yet the span of time required differs vastly. For all beings confined in hell, restoring their innate spirituality and brightness demands an extremely long period. Why? Souls in hell carry heavy defiled habits and grave evil karma. Even if, on rare occasions, a single thought of repentance arises, it is swiftly overpowered by suffering and evil karma. Therefore, Earth Store Bodhisattva uttered this great vow to save and take across living beings: 'I vow not to attain Buddhahood until the hells are empty. Only when all sentient beings are delivered will I certify Bodhi!' Out of compassion, the Bodhisattva told the Yama King: 'Any spirit undergoing punishment in the nether realm who produces even a fleeting instant of repentant thought may come to the Hall of Initial Turning of Nether Radiance to learn the Dharma and be temporarily spared torment.'"

I said: "That is truly wonderful! Does this not mean many beings in hell will attain transcendence?!"

The Magistrate replied: "The number of living beings suffering in hell is boundless. You have visited the hell of sexual misconduct before. Just one subdivision within it, the whip and staff hell, holds an endless multitude of condemned souls, and there are still countless hells you have not seen. Among all these beings undergoing retribution, very few can arouse even a single thought of repentance. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are endlessly compassionate, always adapting their teachings and devising all kinds of skillful arrangements to rescue and take across living beings. Yet have these beings ever sincerely perceived their compassionate resolve to save the world? Ayù, your mission to the hells is arranged through the Buddha's compassion. The nether authorities also hope this account can purify human minds and enable beings to firmly believe in the karmic law of causality so they will not create evil karma that leads to the hells."

We arrived at the Hall of Initial Turning of Nether Radiance in hell. I prostrated to Earth Store Bodhisattva! Tears welled up

uncontrollably the moment I saw Earth Store Bodhisattva, and gratitude surged forth spontaneously. Once again I prostrated to Earth Store Bodhisattva on behalf of all beings. May all beings escape suffering and attain bliss! May all beings dwell in joy! May all beings cultivate diligently and swiftly certify Bodhi and Buddha fruit!

At that moment, Earth Store Bodhisattva was expounding the Five Precepts to the assembly. I noticed there were many Dharma masters among the audience in the hall. As soon as this idea arose in my mind, the Magistrate perceived it and hastened to explain the reason to me.

The Magistrate said, “Many of these Dharma masters broke the precepts against sexual misconduct and theft. Those who come here to listen have all undergone punishment in hell, and some are still serving their sentences. They come to listen to the Dharma here simply because they have aroused a single thought of repentance. When a condemned soul arouses a single idea of repentance within its mind, its mind light will undergo a subtle transformation, and the nether wardens will suspend the condemned soul’s punishment and escort it to the Hall of Initial Turning of Nether Radiance to listen to the Dharma. All souls that come to this hall share one common trait: knowing they are temporarily spared suffering here, they cherish the opportunity deeply, and nearly all are embraced by the kindness and compassion of Earth Store Bodhisattva.”

I noticed that most souls bore dull gray auras, alongside dark cyan, dark red and pitch-black hues, their forms floating lightly. Then I saw one soul weeping bitterly, overwhelmed by profound remorse. At that instant, its aura gradually shifted from murky grey to pale ash, and the soul visibly felt lighter.

The Magistrate explained, “This condemned soul was a vital-essence-stealing ghost in its past life. Before that, he was a practitioner who possessed a generous heart yet failed to uphold the precepts. Neglecting the precepts caused him to fall into the

ghost path and become a vital-essence-stealing ghost. After descending to the ghost path, he sustained himself by continuously stealing vital essence from living humans and precept-breaking practitioners, which soon condemned him to hell."

Then the spirit knelt weeping bitterly to confess before Earth Store Bodhisattva and made a vow: "Compassionate Earth Store Bodhisattva! I have erred! I shall practice and uphold the true Dharma lifetime after lifetime, and forever safeguard your teachings." After Earth Store Bodhisattva graciously accepted his repentance, the ghost enforcers led him away. The Magistrate said he would soon be reborn in the human realm.

The Hall of Initial Turning of Nether Radiance is the only place in the hells that does not feel gloomy to me. It is much like a warm hearth amid the inferno. Normally, my body temperature is very low if I stay in hell for too long, yet I felt quite well today. I was profoundly grateful for Earth Store Bodhisattva's compassionate empowering radiance!

Empowered by Earth Store Bodhisattva's divine power, I continued observing the souls here. I noticed the mind light of many souls was growing brighter, and they were drifting upward.

The Magistrate said: "All souls whose mind light rises can be reborn in the human realm, granted another chance to temper their mind and nature."

I was overjoyed! I wished them all happiness, freedom from suffering, and diligent practice of the true Dharma. Looking toward the entrance, many new souls arrived. It seemed Earth Store Bodhisattva could not rest, for countless living beings still awaited deliverance. The hells stretched boundlessly wide, and I truly did not know when all condemned souls within would be delivered and the hells would become truly empty.

Ayù asked the Magistrate: "What fate awaits the spirit escorted away by the ghost enforcers just now?"

The Magistrate said: "Let me show you!"

We instantly arrived at the Netherworld's Judgment Hall. There we saw the weeping spirit kneeling and giving thanks for Yama's verdict. We heard the spirit say: "I am grateful for Yama's judgment! I am grateful for Earth Store Bodhisattva's compassion! From now on, I shall reform completely and sincerely practice the true Dharma." Afterwards, the spirit was taken to drink Meng Po Soup before proceeding to reincarnate.

I asked the Magistrate: "What lies ahead for this soul-entity?" The Magistrate opened the Register of Life and Death, glanced over it, and said: "This soul-entity is destined to be reborn into a wealthy household lacking right understanding and right views. Though affluent, he will suffer persistent poor health; no grave ailments, yet constant minor illnesses. He is fated to be deceived repeatedly by others. At thirty years of age, he begins spiritual practice and will encounter a transformation body of Earth Store Bodhisattva dwelling in the human world to guide him. His practice in this life will be beset by many demonic obstacles, and he will have no child to attend him at his death. These are residual karmic retributions from his past existence as a vital-essence-stealing ghost. His affluence stems from merits gained through almsgiving when he was a cultivator. His poor health and obstacles in practice are the consequences of stealing vital essence from others. This lifetime presents a great trial, a test of the mind. Despite wealth, thoughts of theft will frequently arise within him, driven by past karmic forces. If he abides by his station, faithfully observes the precepts, bears poor health without complaint, endures deception without retaliation, meets demonic obstacles with calm acceptance, and repents immediately whenever stealing thoughts emerge, his spiritual nature can continue to rise after this life. If he acts in the opposite manner, we may meet again here in the hells."

I said: "Could it really happen? Back to the hells once more?"

The Magistrate said: "We have grown accustomed to such occurrences. Many beings are delivered out of hell by Earth Store

Bodhisattva and successfully reborn among humans, yet before long they return. Hence Earth Store Bodhisattva tirelessly rescues beings from this place. Since that spirit resolved with a great aspiration to uphold the true Dharma, Earth Store Bodhisattva has specially manifested a transformation body to guide him in the human world. Therefore we must never belittle a single idea of arousing the great Bodhi mind. Just this one idea of arousing the great Bodhi mind can attract Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to come to your rescue. All the same, though Buddhas and Bodhisattvas abide beside us living beings, we living beings remain unaware."

"Ayù is truly grateful to you, Magistrate. Ayù has learned many profound truths today!"

I pressed my palms together to thank the Magistrate, and departed by white lotus.

29 / The Boundless Power of the Divine Pearl Mantra — Witnessing the Southern Three Sages Resolve Great Suffering in the Hells

Ever since I resolved to write *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, numerous obstacles have continuously arisen. When we resolve to undertake work that purifies people's minds and exhorts others to practice goodness, we are certain to encounter all manner of trials. Yet our most sincere and pure mind aspiring for goodness fears no trials or hindrances whatsoever. Ayù believes that if we uphold a steadfast, sincere and pure resolve to observe the precepts, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will surely grant their empowerment, enabling us to break through every obstacle. All these hindrances seek to stop me from continuing to write *The Inexorable Nether Laws*.

When I first began writing, demonic obstacles abounded. I was already sleeping very little. Still, non-human beings constantly disturbed me severely while I slumbered, draining my vitality. Once I understood their aim, I ceased engaging with these beings in dreams, for such exchanges wasted energy and hindered my writing. Writing *The Inexorable Nether Laws* can only be accomplished when my state of mind is at its best.

Recently, I have endured some physical afflictions, so I must strengthen my inner mind power. Today, I shall transform all obstacles and physical suffering into motivation for spiritual cultivation. May all hindrances and sufferings of sentient beings across the world be borne solely by me, and all be transformed into Ayù's drive for cultivation.

Homage to my compassionate master who teaches me with devotion! Homage to all patriarchs and eminent practitioners who cultivate the true Dharma and attain great accomplishment!

Homage to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions! Homage to Great Earth Store Bodhisattva!

Today, relying upon Earth Store Bodhisattva's divine power and compassionate empowerment, I would break through obstacles and journey into the hells to witness firsthand how the Bodhisattva liberates sentient beings suffering there!

Namo Earth Store Bodhisattva! Namo Earth Store Bodhisattva! Namo Earth Store Bodhisattva!

Namo Great Vow Earth Store Bodhisattva! Namo Great Vow Earth Store Bodhisattva! Namo Great Vow Earth Store Bodhisattva!

Ayù also aspires to emulate Earth Store Bodhisattva, delivering suffering beings from the sea of torment. *The Inexorable Nether Laws* must be published as soon as possible, so that deluded living beings in the human world may turn back from wrongdoings, abandon evil and practice goodness, and swiftly recover the radiance of their innate spiritual nature.

Grateful for the empowerment of Earth Store Bodhisattva! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

We arrived in the hells! I prostrated to Earth Store Bodhisattva, who graced me with a compassionate smile. The Bodhisattva forever radiates boundless radiance with immense kindness and compassion. Earth Store Bodhisattva manifested in the form of a compassionate monastic figure, seated in full lotus posture. For the first time, I beheld the Bodhisattva upon a cyan lotus blossom throne. In his left hand, He held a pink pearl, and in his right hand, a golden khakkhara. Beside Earth Store Bodhisattva was Diting, his mount. To the Bodhisattva's left stood Bhikshu Daoming, the Dharma Master, and to his right, Elder Min, the Dharma Protector. I prostrated to the Dharma master and the Dharma protector!

Supported directly by Earth Store Bodhisattva's awesome power and empowering grace, I entered the hells without traversing other regions of the nether realm. We gazed down from mid-air. I stood slightly below Earth Store Bodhisattva, closer to the hells. Wailing cries already reached my ears, and I beheld Earth Store Bodhisattva radiating light to bestow empowerment within the inferno.

Dharma Master Daoming informed me this hell is known as the Hell of Wailing. Earth Store Bodhisattva came here today to help one condemned soul transcend. To receive the mercy and compassion of Earth Store Bodhisattva is an immense blessing beyond measure!

Monk Daoming explained that descendants of this condemned soul had been reciting the Earth Store Sutra day and night, drawing the Bodhisattva hither. In one of its past lifetimes, this spirit was a left-home cultivator. Yet during that monastic life, it failed to uphold the precepts purely and could not attain liberation. It was later reborn into a wealthy household in the human realm, where it fell into degeneration. Having transgressed the sexual-misconduct precept, it eventually sank down into the hells.

At that moment, Earth Store Bodhisattva beckoned Elder Min to descend. Elder Min went down and spoke to two ghost enforcers: "Earth Store Bodhisattva summons the male condemned soul XXX." Shortly afterwards, the ghost wardens led forth a male soul trembling all over, bleeding and engulfed in agony. He was far too tormented to utter a single word. He looked neither ghost nor human, a fragile soul so insubstantial that it seemed a strong gust of wind might sweep him away.

Earth Store Bodhisattva instructed the male soul: "Today the mortal Ayù has come to witness the hells. She intends to compose *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, a virtuous work commissioned by the nether authorities to save and take across living beings in the human world. It will exhort them to observe the Five Precepts and

Ten Good Deeds, purify their minds, practice goodness and accumulate virtues, so they may avoid the agonizing karmic retribution of the hells after their lifespan ends. Now tell Ayù: how did you end up in the hells, and what are you feeling at this moment?"

The male soul nodded yet still could not speak. Then Dharma Master Daoming took the pink pearl from Earth Store Bodhisattva's hand and descended beside the condemned soul. Dharma Master Daoming swiftly recited the Dharmakaya Seal Mantra of Earth Store Bodhisattva: "唵。钵啰末邻陀宁。娑婆诃。" (Weng Bolamolintuoning Suopohe). Instantly, the pearl shone with brilliant radiance, illuminating the entire Hell of Wailing. The sufferings of this hell were immediately suspended and alleviated. All condemned souls instantly felt peace in body and mind. The male soul's torment vanished at once. It was as though a powerful warm current flowed through his body, and he finally regained the ability to speak. Even I could feel the warmth of this empowering light.

The male soul said that while alive, he committed sexual misconduct, and also slandered a lay Buddhist practitioner. Out of jealousy toward a lay practitioner who upheld the true Dharma, he resented seeing this lay devotee travel far and wide to propagate the Buddhadharma and receive respect from others. He then slandered the lay practitioner, falsely claiming the devotee did not observe the precepts purely. Due to his slander, many followers turned away, severing others' opportunity to cultivate and destroying their wisdom-life. Though he practiced the Buddhadharma regularly during his lifetime, he still fell into the hells to undergo retribution when his lifespan ended, enduring excruciating suffering every single moment. Fortunately, his son in the human world has grown up, begun to study Buddhadharma, and begun to practice diligently, reciting the Earth Store Sutra every day and dedicating the merits to him.

At this moment, the male soul knelt down, weeping aloud: “Greatly Compassionate Earth Store Bodhisattva, please rescue me! The suffering here is utterly unbearable! I vow to reform myself and atone for my misdeeds. I swear to cultivate and uphold the true Dharma lifetime after lifetime; deliver me from this place. Even my child knows to be filial and recites the Earth Store Sutra daily, dedicating the meritorious virtues to me, yet I committed evil deeds that dragged me into the hells. I wish to be reborn in the human world lifetime after lifetime, uphold pure precepts, be a virtuous person, and contribute to society.”

Empowered by Earth Store Bodhisattva, the condemned soul recollected that he had recited the Bodhisattva’s holy name in the past. At this time, as he kept mentally reciting Namo Earth Store Bodhisattva, his mind light gradually brightened. The male soul noticed his body growing lighter. He recited Namo Earth Store Bodhisattva unceasingly, and his body began to drift upward. I asked Earth Store Bodhisattva: “Why can this male soul transcend so swiftly?”

Earth Store Bodhisattva gave instruction: “When this male soul was a monastic in a past life, although he could not maintain pure precepts all the time, he had once upheld the pure bhikkhu precepts. Thanks to this blessing retribution, he obtained rebirth in the human realm for seven successive lifetimes in wealthy households with filial children. However, in the seventh lifetime, after committing illicit sexual misconduct and slandering virtuous people, he fell into the hells to receive punishment. His deliverance this time comes because his filial son accumulates virtues through practicing goodness on his behalf in the human world, arouses great Bodhi mind, and dedicates powerful meritorious virtues to him. Moreover, the male soul himself offers genuine repentance. No sentient being who can be saved will ever be abandoned by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.”

Earth Store Bodhisattva further explained that after this male soul is reborn in the human realm, he must still endure the

residual retributions for his past offenses of sexual misconduct and slander. He will take a female form and undergo the retribution of marital divorce. Though she speaks the truth, others will refuse to believe her. Nevertheless, following rebirth as a woman, she will definitely cultivate the Buddhadharma. If she cultivates with unwavering faith, upholds the true Dharma, and honors the vows she made within the hells, her spiritual body will gradually regain its radiance.

Now let's look at the second condemned soul in this hell, a female soul. The ghost enforcers brought her forth. Dharma Master Daoming recited the mantra, and once more the precious pearl radiated light to empower the female soul. Her spiritual body was weaker, so the monk needed to chant the mantra for a longer time. Aided by this Dharma power, the female soul gradually regained the ability to speak.

The female soul said that while alive, she spoke sharply and bitterly to everyone. She was especially consumed by jealousy toward her husband's child from his former marriage. She often beat and scolded the child, leaving the youngster wounded and bleeding. Later, she starved the child until the child fainted, then beat the child to death. She was also utterly unfilial to her mother-in-law. Not only did she treat the elder cruelly, but she also repeatedly struck her mother-in-law upon the head, sometimes leaving her head bloodied. For the sake of family harmony, the old lady dared not tell anyone she was assaulted by her daughter-in-law. Eventually, the mother-in-law was infuriated to death by her. After passing away, both the elder mother-in-law and the child brought accusations against this vicious woman before King Yama's Judgment Hall. Once her lifespan ended, she was sentenced to suffer punishment within the Hell of Wailing. Moreover, she would be dispatched to endure torment in other hells as well. She had only newly arrived in the Hell of Wailing, yet had already suffered extreme agony. How would she endure the days lying ahead!

The female soul also knelt down and begged Earth Store Bodhisattva to rescue her from the hells. Earth Store Bodhisattva instructed her: “If only you had not planted the evil causes in the first place! This is Yama’s verdict. Filial piety stands foremost among all virtues. Yama King deeply honors those who are filial in the mortal world. Even if one serves one’s parents with filial devotion for an entire lifetime, one can never repay the kindness of parental upbringing. How dared you treat an elder with brutality? Lack of filial piety is an unforgivable offense under the laws of the netherworld, and you must engage in earnest repentance. Heaven possesses the virtue of nurturing all creatures. The child born to your husband’s former wife had already endured great inner trauma from losing its birth mother. You ought to have cared for the child as your own, tending to it with compassion to soothe its wounded heart. Instead, you beat and scolded this child, starving it until it fainted before beating it to death. To slay a defenseless young child reveals an utterly vicious nature. Such causes inevitably bring forth such effects! You must practice sincere and vigorous repentance. In the end, only you yourself can save you.”

The female soul knelt in agony, pleading for mercy. “Bodhisattva, save me! I kowtow to you. When I was alive, no one dared point out my faults. If anyone uttered even a word of criticism against me, I would instantly retaliate with vicious words and even resort to violence. I liked striking people on the head, for it could render them unconscious, and then I would prevail. I craved victory and would never admit defeat. Having heard your teachings today, I realize I committed grave wrongs. I acknowledge my transgressions; I beg you to deliver me from the hells!”

At that moment, the hell attendants led the female soul away.

I saw that the female soul’s mind light was no longer as dim as before, yet it remained far from bright. I asked Earth Store

Bodhisattva: “Must this female soul endure all her karmic punishments in the hells in full before she may depart?”

Earth Store Bodhisattva instructed: “Thanks to the karmic affinity she forms here today, she may encounter the true Dharma and cultivate when reborn in the human world in the distant future. For now, we merely enable her to plant a virtuous seed of affinity.”

I was grateful for Earth Store Bodhisattva’s guidance. These teachings were like ambrosia pouring straight into my body and mind!

I bowed to thank the Bodhisattva and took my leave.

I prostrated in homage to Earth Store Bodhisattva!

I prostrated to Dharma Master Daoming!

I prostrated to Dharma Protector Elder Min!

I returned by white lotus flower.

30 / The Magistrate Reveals the Truth of The Jade Record — Wholeheartedly Uphold The Jade Record and *The Inexorable Nether Laws*

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

“Amitabha!”I, Ayù, pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate.

I asked the Magistrate, “What of the authenticity of The Jade Record, which has circulated for a long time in the mortal world?” The Magistrate replied: “The Jade Record is genuine. It is a precious classic specially transmitted to the human realm out of the profound compassion of Great Emperor Fengdu, the Nether Sovereign Yama King. The Jade Record was written by a Dao cultivator named Danchi. During meditation, Danchi traveled through the netherworld and recorded his journey in manuscript. Later, he passed the manuscript to his disciple Daoist Wumi, and it was from Wumi that The Jade Record began to spread throughout the mortal world. After touring the hells in those days, Daoist Danchi did not immediately publish and circulate the work to humanity. Instead, he entrusted his disciple Daoist Wumi to propagate it only shortly before his passing and transcendence.

“The hells were far smaller in ancient times. There was only one Great Emperor Fengdu, the Nether Sovereign Yama King, who was the supreme ruler of the nether realm. Under him were the Ten Yama Kings, the second tier of authority who received orders from Great Emperor Fengdu. Each of the Ten Yama Kings governed the greater and lesser hells within their respective halls.

Up to the present day, there remains one supreme ruler over the netherworld: the Nether Sovereign Yama King. However, two additional kings have been appointed beneath him, raising the total number from the original Ten Kings of Hell to the Twelve Kings of Hell. The appointment of these two new Yama kings has not lessened the workload for the hell kings. Instead, ever more condemned souls fall into the hells, and every hell is overcrowded. Consequently, the workload of all hell kings has surged dramatically. The king in charge of the Hells of Sexual Misconduct, in particular, bears a severely overburdened workload.

"Even the original Ten Halls have now expanded greatly in area. Ayù, you visited the Hells of Sexual Misconduct not long ago. They stretch to the west and north of the infernal realm. Overseeing all the various hells within that region is King Qingping. At present, the Hells of Sexual Misconduct occupy the largest land area among all hells. To accommodate newly constructed hells, the netherworld authorities have adjusted the internal layout of certain infernal regions. There is another ruler in the netherworld named King Haishan, who governs the Spiritual Nature Hells of the south. Eight hells fall under his jurisdiction. Among them stands the massive Hell of Wailing City of the Wrongfully Dead, which you have witnessed before. There are also large hells such as the Hell of Abundant Harvest for those who waste food, the Hell of Wrong Views and Slander, and the Vajrayana Hell. Multitudes of modern beings are sent to these hells to undergo karmic retribution. King Haishan oversees these newly built southern hells, which Daoist Danchi never got to visit. In ancient times, human minds were comparatively pure, and there was no need for such an extensive array of Hells of Sexual Misconduct to mete out punishment. Of course, people committed evil deeds back then, yet never as recklessly and brazenly as they do today. In ages past, the Ten Halls of Hell were sufficient to discipline the living beings who sank down from the mortal world after committing the Ten Evils. Nowadays, countless beings in

the human world practice evil, while very few cultivate goodness. Not even one out of five hundred people practices goodness and observes the precepts, and those who transgress moral laws and break the precepts can be found everywhere.

"Both The Jade Record and *The Inexorable Nether Laws* are important books emanating from the netherworld to exhort and transform the hearts of people in the human realm. The accounts in *The Inexorable Nether Laws* are set forth with greater clarity and thoroughness, presenting the current true conditions within the netherworld.

"Furthermore, the burden of your responsibility is immense. The Heavenly Emperor and the Nether Sovereign Yama King eagerly anticipate that *The Inexorable Nether Laws* may circulate in the human world as soon as possible. They hope it can soon help restore people's hearts, purify the human world and reduce the vast number of living beings who continue to fall into the hells day after day. Our discussion shall conclude here for today. Return again should you have further questions."

"*Amitabha*! Gratitude to the Magistrate!" After pressing my palms together and bowing to the Magistrate, I returned by white lotus flower.

31 / The Horrific Torments of the Great Avīchi Hell; Divine Beast Diting Teaches the Practice of Altruism

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

“Amitabha!”I, Ayù, pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. “Magistrate, may I witness how Earth Store Bodhisattva rescues beings from suffering within the hells today?”

The Magistrate replied, “Earth Store Bodhisattva manifests many division bodies, laboring to relieve suffering in numerous great and small hells. Which hell would you wish to observe, Ayù?”

“In the human world, I have heard that Earth Store Bodhisattva has three transformation bodies: one within the hells, one in the human realm, and one in the heaven realms. Is this accurate?”

The Magistrate said: “Earth Store Bodhisattva is a great Bodhisattva who uttered the vast vow: ‘I vow not to attain Buddhahood until the hells are emptied.’ Although the hells have not yet been emptied, the Bodhisattva’s merits and virtues are already fully perfected. The Bodhisattva saves and takes across living beings not only in the hells, the human world and the heaven realm, but also sends forth division bodies to other remote hells to save and take across the afflicted living beings there. The living beings in those distant hells must likewise be liberated, and the Bodhisattva manifests division bodies to rescue living beings across other times and dimensions. The Bodhisattva has far more than three division bodies. He possesses hundreds of millions upon billions of division bodies, and each division body travels to different worlds to liberate all sentient beings. Earth Store Bodhisattva holds a special karmic affinity with the living beings

in the human world, for the majority of beings falling into the hells originate from the human world. For this reason, we ought to be thankful for the Bodhisattva's compassionate teachings.

"Many transformation bodies of Earth Store Bodhisattva dwell in the human world. Some have only recently been reborn and are under three years old; some are still studying; others have grown to adulthood. In time, they will quietly carry forward the work of the Buddha's wisdom-life and guide all sentient beings according to conditions. Certain transformation bodies of the Bodhisattva guide beings humbly through their entire lives, unknown to the world. Others establish Dharma centres to propagate the true Dharma. Every such manifestation comes about through the subtle arrangement of the Bodhisattva.

"There may well be those transformation bodies of Earth Store Bodhisattva near us, subtly influencing others and setting an example, silently teaching us to rectify our flawed dispositions. Yet we cannot recognise the Bodhisattva, mistaking such great beings for ordinary mortals, and the Bodhisattva will never reveal his identity. We must learn from Earth Store Bodhisattva to cultivate vast aspirations. Having vowed to liberate living beings, the Bodhisattva acts upon this vow. Thus the Bodhisattva's mind pervades the ten directions and all space of the Dharma realm, and so too does his vow. His vow endures without end, even if empty space itself should come to an end. Take the vow to give alms to beggars as an example. Though one makes the vow once, the practice of giving occurs innumerable times, and continues lifetime after lifetime. The moment one forms this vow, the seed of almsgiving to beggars abides within one's mind across all lifetimes. The vow is singular; the practices are manifold. If one encounters a beggar yet withholds generosity, one goes against one's own vow. One should emulate Earth Store Bodhisattva and form virtuous vows to liberate living beings. Every thought of his acts is in accordance with his vow. If one upholds one's vow in every thought, one will attain accomplishment time and again.

Sustained repeated accomplishments bring forth spiritual power. The more living beings one liberates, the greater one's spiritual power and the power of one's blessings and virtues. When one continuously strives to liberate living beings thought after thought, one's spiritual power becomes boundless. With boundless spiritual power, one can manifest boundless bodies, travelling to boundless realms to liberate living beings.

"In our hells, there are even more transformation bodies of Earth Store Bodhisattva. You visited the Hall of Initial Turning of Nether Radiance last time. Earth Store Bodhisattva gives three Dharma talks in hell each day: in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. When condemned souls hear the Dharma, their roots of goodness begin to sprout, and remorse arises in their minds as these good roots emerge. The moment they feel remorse, Earth Store Bodhisattva delivers them out of the hell. There is another circumstance: if a condemned soul possesses sufficient blessings, Earth Store Bodhisattva will manifest a division body beside the condemned soul to guide and save them. This is one of the ways Earth Store Bodhisattva liberates living beings in the hells. Every day, Earth Store Bodhisattva successfully delivers countless condemned souls from the hells. Were it not for the salvation granted by Earth Store Bodhisattva to suffering beings in the hells, who knows how many times greater their numbers might be.

"There is yet another case: Earth Store Bodhisattva also arranges to rescue the deceased relatives of condemned souls according to how filial their descendants are in the mortal world. If descendants living in the human realm recite the Earth Store Sutra, chant the name of Earth Store Bodhisattva, pay homage to the Buddhas, make offerings to the Buddhas, release living creatures, print Buddhist sutras and virtuous books to guide the world, aid widows, orphans and the poor, and perform all other deeds that lead people toward goodness, cultivate goodness, and accumulate virtue, when these descendants dedicate the meritorious virtue from such good deeds to their ancestors

suffering in the hells, the Bodhisattva will arrange for those sinful ancestors to be rescued from the hells.

"Earth Store Bodhisattva also observes whether a condemned soul has fully ripened the karmic conditions for deliverance. Some condemned souls have no descendants or relatives to perform virtuous deeds and transfer meritorious virtue for their liberation, yet they possess some good roots, blessings, virtues and virtuous conditions from past lifetimes. For instance, many left-home people fell into the hells after breaking the precepts, yet there were times when they upheld the precepts purely and practiced good deeds in the past. Others once gazed upon the Bodhisattva with a single thought, quietly listened to the Dharma for a fleeting moment, or chanted the holy name of Earth Store Bodhisattva. For such living beings, the Bodhisattva comes uninvited to teach and transform them."

I said: "Then let us visit the dreaded Avīci Hell today! I wonder whether Earth Store Bodhisattva will be there."

The Magistrate replied: "Earth Store Bodhisattva visits every hell. You have not yet seen the Avīci Hell, Ayù. Come and follow me."

We needed to traverse several passageways to reach the Avīci Hell. Along the way, endless cries and wails of suffering drifted toward us. The hell is saturated with overwhelming grief, terror and agony. Now I comprehended why the Bodhisattva exhorted me to cultivate diligently before I wrote *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. Anyone lacking sufficient concentration power would be engulfed by the intensely negative magnetic field permeating this place. This is truly no place for humans. May all tormented beings trapped in hell attain deliverance soon! Without the enveloping protection of the Buddhas' power, even if I were not overwhelmed, I would expend most of my vitality. I am grateful for the Buddhas' blessing and support. I, Ayù, had to fulfill this mission well to repay the profound kindness of the Buddhas!

Right at that moment, my heart began to race. Super terrifying sounds reverberated all around. The place appeared desolate and crude, far less constructed than the Hell of Sexual Misconduct with its relatively modern appearance. This hell is secured behind many tightly barred gates. Oh! The heat is overwhelming; it is unbearably hot!

The Magistrate explained: “Once condemned souls enter this hell, they cannot leave. All living beings consigned here are those whose evil deeds have reached the ultimate extreme. The subterranean magma within exceeds one thousand degrees. This can be called the severest punishment among all our hells!”

One thousand degrees? That was utterly horrifying! For the sake of completing *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, I had to summon my courage to behold it. Empowered by the Buddha’s strength, I was permitted to peer inside through a small iron window of the Avīci Hell. The hell itself is not vast. Its shape resembles a human nose, with a dark hollow cavity at its centre. This chasm leads down to subterranean magma that billows with smoke, blazing ferociously. Condemned souls are boiled thoroughly in the smouldering magma before being hurled upward. They are not cast to another location, but suspended amid the scorching fumes rising from the magma to be scorched and burned. Before their soul entities can recover, still screaming in excruciating torment, they are dragged back down into the blazing magma to undergo punishment once more, letting out another shrill cry of agony. Such is the Avīci Hell: suffering cycles on without the slightest respite. The scene is unspeakably tragic.

It had been pitch-black and sweltering just moments before, yet suddenly an incomparably refreshing sensation descended. I lifted my gaze and saw that the venerable Earth Store Bodhisattva had arrived in compassion. I prostrated myself before Earth Store Bodhisattva! Today the Bodhisattva did not manifest a gentle, compassionate appearance; instead, he appeared as a standing wrathful manifestation of Earth Store Bodhisattva. Behind the

Bodhisattva radiated a vast circular golden aureole. He stood upon a blue-green lotus flower, beneath which blazed raging flames. Yet these flames brought no stifling heat. On the contrary, they gave me a sense of delusive thoughts being dispelled. The precious pearl held in Earth Store Bodhisattva's left hand was fiery red. At the apex of the golden khakkhara in his right hand bloomed an additional red lotus blossom. The Bodhisattva emanated immense power to subdue demons. At first sight, one could not help but stand in awe and reverence, daring not to give rise to any frivolous or deluded thought. This was the first time I had beheld Earth Store Bodhisattva in such a stern bearing. Dharma Master Daoming and Dharma Protector Elder Min, standing on either side, showed little change. Daoming manifested the dignified appearance of a bhikkhu, crossing his hands to form the demon-subduing mudra. Dharma Protector Elder Min stood beside the Bodhisattva with palms joined. The Bodhisattva's mount, Diting, however, had grown far larger in stature and also displayed a wrathful countenance.

Suddenly an official of the netherworld came to report that an affair required the Magistrate's attention in the Judgment Hall. The Magistrate then told me I might continue my observation on my own; should I have any questions, I could make supplication to Earth Store Bodhisattva. I pressed my palms together to bow and express gratitude to the Magistrate!

At that moment, Earth Store Bodhisattva gestured for me to fly upward first. The gates of the Avīci Hell would be opened after a short while, for the Bodhisattva feared the scorching magma might injure me. Relying on the mighty spiritual power of Earth Store Bodhisattva, I ascended to a position beneath him and suspended myself in mid-air. Meanwhile, Dharma Protector Elder Min descended before the multiple iron gates of the Avīci Hell. Two ghost enforcers opened the gates and stepped out, then cautiously shut them right away, worried that splashes of magma would land on Dharma Protector Elder Min. Dharma Protector

Elder Min said there was an edict from the Yama King permitting several condemned souls to be brought out as cases for Ayù's reference. Earth Store Bodhisattva instructed that three condemned souls be summoned. Ordinarily, not a single condemned soul can ever be released from the Avīci Hell. The ghost enforcers therefore went back inside and led out three condemned souls. The three condemned souls emerged: two male souls and one female soul. Tormented beyond endurance, they could not stand and were utterly incapable of speech. Covered in mire with festering, disfigured bodies, they looked pitiable in the extreme. Seeing their miserable plight, I was on the verge of tears.

Right then, Dharma Master Daoming took the crimson pearl from Earth Store Bodhisattva's hand and began reciting mantras. Instantly, the pearl radiated boundless light that permeated every corner of the Avīci Hell. The entire hell grew incomparably cool and tranquil. All cries of suffering fell silent, and the magma lost its scorching heat. All my nervousness faded away, replaced by a peaceful, warm sense of ease. Listening closely, I recognized it was the Earth Store Bodhisattva Dhāraṇī. I had held this mantra deeply dear. After Daoming chanted for some time, the three condemned souls gradually regained consciousness. Coming to their senses, the male souls managed to drop to their knees.

Earth Store Bodhisattva said: "The mortal Shangguan Yuhua shall compose *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, a virtuous book designated by the nether realm to exhort people of the mortal world to abandon evil and return to goodness. Now tell Ayù: how did you end up in the Avīci Hell, and what crimes did you commit in your lifetime?" Weeping bitterly, the male soul replied that when he was alive, he specialized in developing aphrodisiacs for licentious purposes. He also produced obscene books and discs promoting masturbation, earning great wealth from these deeds. He admitted these were his grievous misdeeds and begged the Bodhisattva to save him. Earth Store Bodhisattva instructed the male soul: "Licentious aphrodisiacs, obscene books and discs

corrupt people's good, pure mind and nature. In particular, discs promoting masturbation shake the mind and nature of young boys with pure yang constitution. Once such youths fall into these bad habits, they embark on a path that harms their bodies, shortens their lifespan and severs their wisdom life—a transgression not pardoned by the nether laws. You cannot leave this hell until all such obscene articles made in the mortal world have completely vanished." As soon as the Bodhisattva finished speaking, the male condemned soul was immediately dragged back into the hell.

Then it was the female soul's turn. The female soul said: "I was beautiful, highly educated and eloquent when alive. Yet I was deeply greedy, arrogant and full of jealousy. Though married, I looked down on my husband and treated my parents-in-law without filial piety, often assaulting them with harsh, bitter words. I secretly engaged in multiple extramarital affairs leveraging my charm. I manipulated others with words so they handed over their money to me, then drove them into inferiority and to their deaths. I thought I was clever and no one would ever find out. The three men I drove to death filed accusations against me before Yama King. The king ordered the three souls to go back to the mortal world to seize my spirit and bring me to hell for punishment. Before being sent to the Avīci Hell, I had already endured all manner of torments in other hells. I beg you, Bodhisattva, rescue me. If I can leave, I will reform myself and never deceive others again."

Earth Store Bodhisattva said: "Your fine features are the karmic result of sincerely offering flowers before the Buddhas in your past lives. Your eloquence and intelligence come from listening to the Dharma and reciting sutras in former lifetimes. Nevertheless, your arrogance dragged your life straight downwards. You ought to repent and reflect deeply upon the magnitude of the four great kindnesses. Remain here in the Avīci Hell to earnestly repent." Right after the Bodhisattva spoke, ghost enforcers used their forks

to prod the female soul back inside. A shrill, agonizing scream echoed forth.

Next came the other male soul. He said that in his earthly life, he manufactured and sold counterfeit medicinal herbs and fake wine. He also secretly trafficked weapons. After amassing huge profits, his enterprises kept expanding. He slandered other people's reputations to boost the fame of his own company. He knew he had erred after arriving in hell, yet it was already too late.

The male soul pleaded: "Bodhisattva, please save me! I implore you. The suffering here is unbearable. I would even be willing to become another dog beside you. I can follow your hound and be a hardworking, obedient little dog at your side. Bodhisattva, please deliver me out of this place!"

Earth Store Bodhisattva instructed: "Selling counterfeit medicinal herbs and trafficking weapons gravely endanger human lives. Such acts are strictly prohibited even by mortal laws, and the nether laws mete out far harsher retribution. Upon the end of their lifespan, wrongdoers are cast into the Avīci Hell with no hope of transcendence. You must engage in sincere repentance within the Avīci Hell! The creature beside me is not a dog; its name is Diting. Diting is cultivated in the Dharma, manifested from my own mind and nature, and is not an animal born within the six paths of reincarnation."

"I humbly ask Earth Store Bodhisattva: may Ayù speak with Diting?"

Earth Store Bodhisattva replied, "You may speak, Ayù."

I said: "*Amitabha*! Diting! I did not know you were also cultivating the Dharma. I once thought you merely accompanied the Bodhisattva each day, and I truly admire you. You can follow Earth Store Bodhisattva day and night to liberate living beings everywhere. Ayù rejoices in all your meritorious virtues!"

Diting said: "You are too modest, Ayù. We are both cultivating. As the saying goes: 'Fulfill the duties belonging to your station; attend to all matters within your responsibility.' Every living being

ought to exert their utmost strength and perform their own obligations well. While faithfully carrying out all one's duties without fault, one should also undertake acts to aid others, namely altruistic deeds. To help others is in truth to accumulate meritorious virtues for oneself. Before we attain Buddhahood, all so-called altruistic acts we perform ultimately benefit ourselves, for our own blessings and virtues are yet incomplete. Until our blessings and virtues are fully perfected, we still need to amass blessings, virtues and spiritual provisions. Therefore, assisting others is gathering the provisions needed for our own cultivation. Only the Buddhas possess perfect, complete blessings and virtues. Hence only the Buddhas can be said to act wholly for others' benefit. I, Diting, am blessed by the Bodhisattva's compassionate care, granting me the opportunity to learn steadily."

I said: "I am grateful for your teachings, Diting. Truly, as a Dharma protector beside a great Bodhisattva, your words are extraordinary. I sincerely rejoice in your accomplishments!"

I then asked Earth Store Bodhisattva: "Regarding that female soul from earlier, you said she practiced Buddhadharma in past lives, yet she has been consigned to the Avīci Hell, never to transcend. Does that mean she has no hope at all?"

Earth Store Bodhisattva gave further instruction: "I told her to repent. Though she spoke of amending her ways, her mind has not yet reached genuine remorse. She only wishes to escape immediately because the sufferings of the Avīci Hell are unbearable. After a period of time, when her mind becomes purer, I shall return to save her. For now, she still needs to temper her mind amid the torments of the Avīci Hell."

I said: "Earth Store Bodhisattva truly abides by the vow: 'I vow not to attain Buddhahood until the hells are emptied.' I long to learn under your guidance!"

Ayù felt boundless gratitude for the Bodhisattva's teachings and guidance!

Disciple Ayù wholeheartedly prostrated to this great compassionate saviour, who alleviates sufferings through the Ten Wheels, bringing benefit to beings both in the mortal world and the nether realm. Homage to the greatly sagely, greatly kind, greatly vowed Earth Store Bodhisattva Mahasattva!

After paying homage to Earth Store Bodhisattva, I returned by white lotus flower.

32 / The Magistrate: “Virgin Mary is a Transformation Body of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.” — Guanshiyin Bodhisattva Travels the Hells to Relieve Suffering

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

“Amitabha!”I, Ayù, pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. “Magistrate! I wish to ask, apart from Earth Store Bodhisattva who abides often in the hells, are there other noble sages who rescue beings from suffering within the netherworld?”

The magistrate said, “Indeed there are! There are also Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, Manjushri Bodhisattva, *Amitabha*, Medicine Master Buddha and others. Though Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, Manjushri Bodhisattva, Earth Store Bodhisattva manifest in the form of Bodhisattvas, they in truth possess complete Buddha merits and virtues, no different from Buddhas. As the saying goes: ‘When one Buddha appears in the world, a thousand Buddhas stand in support.’ Guanshiyin Bodhisattva attained Buddhahood countless kalpas ago, bearing the title Buddha of True Dharma Brightness Tathagata. Manjushri Bodhisattva is the Mother of the Seven Buddhas. Among Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, there is no ranking of first or second. All are equal, just as every beam of light shines upon and resonates with one another. A Buddha embodies the purest form of supreme wisdom and supreme luminous essence in the universe. Every Buddha possesses great spiritual power, capable of all things and knowing all things. Every Buddha embodies unconditional great kindness and same-body great compassion, which are precisely

the supreme eternal balance between the wisdom and sentiment of a Buddha. These two interpenetrate and operate simultaneously, showing a type of kind affection manifested by the perfect unity of compassion and wisdom. Rooted in such kind affection, all beings are equal, and there is no distinction between foes and relatives, different ethnicities, or religious traditions. Endowed with such kindness and compassion, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas equally deliver and save all living beings, including even fleeting and fragile animals and plants. This marks the fundamental difference between Buddhas and ordinary people. Ordinary people are incapable of achieving the supreme balance of wisdom and sentiment, hence unable to descend into hell to liberate living beings, while Buddhas can manifest and save living beings in hell at all times.

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas liberate sentient beings in the hells in accordance with karmic laws; they never disrupt the law of cause and effect. Within the hells dwells a type of condemned souls who descended from the mortal world. In their earthly lifetimes, they strove diligently in cultivation yet failed to observe the precepts, thus reaping severe evil retribution and falling into the hells. When they are brought to the Judgment Hall of the netherworld for interrogation or sentencing, some are able to recite mantras of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. As they utter these mantras, tremendous spiritual power arises to shield the condemned souls. At such times, Yama King will order ghost officers to escort them to the Mengpo Pavilion to drink Mengpo's soup. Immediately afterward, they are reborn into the human world, only to suffer stillbirth. Once a soul-entity has entered a womb, it must endure the suffering of the ten-month "womb prison," dwelling curled up inside the mother's narrow womb for seven to ten months. The length of stay within the womb differs for each soul-entity, determined by their individual karmic forces. While dwelling in the womb, confined within this tiny "prison", the soul-entity already undergoes great torment. Moreover, it

endures constant shifts of the mother's emotions day and night. Hot and cold foods consumed by the mother inflict pains upon the fetus comparable to the torments of the hells of heat and cold. Amid all these sufferings of the womb prison, souls easily forget the mantras they recited in past lives. Only great cultivators are exempt from the sufferings of the womb prison after conception. After entering the womb, great cultivators may move freely in and out. They can choose to refrain from fully entering the womb temporarily, remaining outside to sustain the proper development of the physical body within the mother. They only enter the womb formally at the moment of birth. By contrast, ordinary souls cannot depart once they enter the womb; they have to endure all sufferings of the womb prison until delivery.

After these condemned souls die in the womb, they lose memory of the mantras they once chanted, and are once again brought to hell to receive sentencing. If a condemned soul still retains memory of those mantras, the cycle of stillbirth will repeat time and again, until the mantras are completely forgotten and the hellish karmic punishment proceeds. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas come to save beings in hell only after condemned souls have undergone their destined karmic penalties. If remorse arises within them, the Bodhisattvas observe whether conditions for spiritual restoration ripen, and come to deliver them accordingly.

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva frequently relieves suffering within the hells. Recently, the Bodhisattva came to the Hell of Sexual Misconduct to liberate living beings. I shall take you to observe and learn. Very few parents of the young offenders suffering punishment in this hell perform good deeds in the mortal world and dedicate the merits to their children, which would draw Guanshiyin Bodhisattva to deliver them from hell. As the Buddha states in the Universal Door Chapter: "The Buddha told Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva, 'Good man, if any of the limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of living beings who are undergoing all kinds of sufferings hear of

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva and recite his name single-mindedly, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will immediately hear their voices and rescue them.'"

We arrived! A radiance of Buddha light washed over this place, and the hell instantly turned cool and tranquil. Such purity brings peace to body and mind! The Magistrate said that Guanshiyin Bodhisattva was delivering a youth in the Hell of Electric Eyes and Iron Balls!

I, the disciple Shangguan Yuhua, made a five-point prostration to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. I beheld the bodily appearance manifested by the Bodhisattva was the merciful form of the Catholic Virgin Mary. The Magistrate explained that the Virgin Mary is in truth one of the manifested transformation bodies of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.

The Buddha said in the Universal Door Chapter: "Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, 'World Honored One, how does Guanshiyin Bodhisattva roam through this Saha world? How does he speak the Dharma for living beings? How does he carry out this work with the power of expedients?' The Buddha told Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva, 'Good man, if living beings in this land must be saved by means of someone in the body of a Buddha, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will manifest in the body of a Buddha and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Pratyekabuddha, he will manifest in the body of a Pratyekabuddha and speak Dharma for them.'" Guanshiyin Bodhisattva takes across living beings according to conditions, manifesting corresponding bodily appearances as suited to deliver each living being.

I took a look at the youth suffering in the Hell of Electric Eyes and Iron Balls; he looked strangely familiar. Ah! I remembered! One year ago, I saw his portrait of the deceased in the mourning hall at the funeral parlor. His mourning hall was right next to that of my relative. Back then, his parents held his funeral according to Catholic rites. They burned no incense and held no Buddhist

Dharma ceremonies; they only chanted scriptures and offered prayers. The Magistrate told me previously that this boy passed away at the age of twelve.

The youth was his parents' only son. They wept every single day and had yet to recover from their grief. They believed in Catholicism. They only knew to pray to the Virgin Mary daily and perform good deeds to aid the poor. Precisely because of such conduct, they attracted the merciful Guanshiyin Bodhisattva to come and instruct the boy.

Now I beheld the Virgin Mary radiating pure white rays of compassionate light once more. The instant the light swept over the entire hell, the hell turned cool, and all torments temporarily ceased. I recalled how terribly the boy suffered when I visited the Hell of Iron Pellets and Glowing Eyes last year. Blood covered the ground, and the sight was too horrid to see. The youth made the sign of the cross over his body and exclaimed, "I give thanks to the Holy Virgin Mary. I never imagined I would meet the Holy Virgin in person."

At that moment, the Virgin Mary spoke with a gentle and compassionate voice: "Every part of your body, skin and hair is received from your parents. Child, your mortal lifespan has not yet ended, yet your spirit has already descended to the netherworld. Do you know that your parents in the mortal world suffer as though pierced by ten thousand arrows?"

Tears streamed uncontrollably down the youth's face as he wept: "If only time could turn back, I would never view any pornographic publications again. Today I shall confess my sins thoroughly before the Holy Virgin Mary. I long to repent to my parents, yet I can no longer communicate with them. I have been gravely unfilial! I deserve to die! My parents loved me deeply. Whatever I desired, they would grant my wishes. We enjoyed abundant material comforts. I lived in a large residence, with two servants attending to my daily needs day and night. I deeply felt

my parents' affection for me. Now I can only hope to repay their kindness of raising me in the next lifetime.

It all began out of mere curiosity. I was only six years old when I encountered pornographic websites on a computer and started to masturbate while seeing them. At first, I thought it was merely amusing, but I soon became addicted. The addiction turned into a habit, and I masturbated nearly every day. I would even sneak into school restrooms to commit this grave error. My parents were occupied with work, leaving home early and returning late each day. After school, only the servants accompanied me. Whenever my parents were away, these two servants often chatted on the telephone with their friends. Seeing me stay in my room, they assumed I was well-behaved and left me undisturbed.

This continued until I turned ten. I began to suffer lower back pain, constant exhaustion and lack of strength, and perpetual drowsiness. I even needed a walking stick to move, looking just like an aged old man. My mother took me to countless physicians, yet none could cure my condition. Eventually, a Chinese medicine doctor diagnosed severe kidney depletion and premature senility. Only then did my parents learn about my habit of masturbation. Though I was reprimanded, my parents loved their son dearly, and they continued seeking famous doctors everywhere to treat me. I also began to recognize the harm of masturbation and stopped for a period of time. Seeing me behave, my parents loosened their supervision over me.

While I was taking medicine, pornographic images and voices constantly surfaced in my mind and would not fade away. I knew it was wrong, yet I could not restrain myself, and secretly resumed masturbating. Every time after the act, I would feel utterly drained and dizzy. Finally, at twelve years old, Ox-Head and Horse-Face dragged me to hell bound by heavy iron chains to endure punishment. I had always committed this act secretly inside my room, hiding it deep in my heart and telling no one. It feels such a relief to speak of everything today. Many of my

classmates visit pornographic websites without their parents' knowledge. I wish to depart this place. Holy Virgin, I beg you to save me and take me to the Kingdom of Heaven. In heaven, I will tell my classmates never to browse pornographic websites and never to commit the evil deed of masturbation again!"

The Virgin Mary instructed him: "Your parents in the mortal world still yearn for you every single day!" The youth said: "Holy Virgin! I earnestly beg you to deliver me. I no longer wish to go to the Kingdom of Heaven. I want to help my classmates and exhort all young boys to avoid pornographic websites and refrain from masturbation. If I fail to do so, let my hands be cut off and my mouth rot away."

The Virgin Mary proclaimed: "It is excellent that you possess the resolve to reform completely. All transgressions arise from the mind; they are created by the mind. You must cultivate vigilance at the instant thoughts arise. Abide in right mindfulness at all times, and you will naturally remain undefiled by depraved thoughts. Your vow to persuade sentient beings to abandon the vicious habit of sexual misconduct is a virtuous aspiration. However, swearing that your hands will be cut off and your mouth rot away if you fail constitutes an evil vow. The moment you utter an evil vow, you lose right mindfulness. We may make vows, yet we should only form virtuous aspirations and never evil ones. Both virtuous and evil vows constitute a cause, and every cause inevitably bears its fruit. Once a person makes a vow, that vow will come to fruition one day. A vow is an invisible force that drives us lifetime after lifetime. One may constantly renew virtuous vows, which nurture and elevate the radiance of our spiritual nature. Evil vows must never be spoken, for they initiate a vicious cycle whereby we reap what we have sown. In worse cases, those who make such vows harm other people and living things, damaging others as well as themselves. Evil vows are a cause of decline, while virtuous vows are the foundation leading our lives toward brightness."

Through the empowerment and salvation of the Bodhisattva, the dim crimson radiance surrounding the youth's mind had faded to pale white, and his spirit was ascending upward. I asked the Magistrate: "This youth descended into hell only recently and has not yet completed his karmic punishments. Why is he able to attain liberation and ascend so swiftly?"

The Magistrate replied: "The youth's original mind-nature was not deeply flawed. His parents were overly occupied and failed to provide timely proper positive guidance. Lacking right understanding and right views, he strayed onto the wrong path and fell into hell. Now he encounters deliverance from Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. Supported by the Bodhisattva's majestic spiritual power, coupled with the youth's sincere repentance, these two combined forces enable such rapid ascension."

"I have learned a great deal once more today! Thank you, Magistrate, for your patient explanations."

After I pressed my palms together toward the Magistrate, I returned by white lotus flower.

Postscript

The Nether Laws Are Inexorable, Yet the Buddhas Are Compassionate

Some netizens ask why the laws of the netherworld are “inexorable”. These laws can also be regarded as the manifestation of the law of cause and effect, an unchanging cosmic principle. To say they are inexorable means karmic consequences are inevitable and can never be altered by any factor. As you sow, so shall you reap. The law of cause and effect spans three lifetimes. Hence retribution may not manifest in the present life, yet the law of karma is utterly real and undeniable. It makes no exceptions or distinctions based on status, rank, wealth, fame, gender, age, race or any other differences. All beings are equal before the law of karma — this is why the karmic laws of the netherworld are called inexorable.

Nevertheless, while the nether laws are inexorable, the Buddhas are compassionate. Though the principle of karma itself never changes, there exists a transitional phase of conditions before karmic fruition of good and evil takes shape. During this phase, transformation is possible through repenting faults and embracing goodness. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas possess boundless kindness and compassion. Ceaselessly and tirelessly, they benefit all beings, teaching in accordance with each being’s capacity, guiding others as conditions arise, and perpetually turning the Wheel of Righteous Dharma. Through this, beings gain support to escape suffering and attain joy, and tread the path to ultimate liberation. The teachings of Buddhas are the beacon that swiftly guides sentient beings to the other shore.

In the present era, though virtuous people dwell in the human world, the force of evil deeds committed without understanding cause and effect is even stronger. Disasters, wars and illnesses occur frequently. Even with the combined might of the awesome

power, power of merits, compassion, wholesome karma and merit dedication of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, these combined forces only address the symptoms. To address the root cause, everyone should understand cause and effect, turn from wrongdoing and embrace goodness. As circumstances transform in accordance with the mind, all Buddhas perpetually turn the Dharma Wheel.

The book *The Inexorable Nether Laws* emerges in response to the times and prevailing conditions, embodying the compassionate arrangements of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who pity all living beings. Senior Shangguan Yuhua spared no effort, bravely shouldering this great responsibility and serving all beings with wholehearted devotion. Though some living beings create karmic offenses out of ignorance of cause and effect and refuse to heed repeated exhortations, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas cannot bear to watch them suffer. Thus they allow living beings to witness the true reality of the hells, giving rise to sincere remorse and resolve to reform. This serves as a warning to the world: those who have not yet committed evil deeds may learn from this and refrain from wrongdoing. It is like erecting a final barrier before the hells, stopping beings from descending to endure torment. The boundless kindness of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who protect living beings at all times and everywhere, can never be fully recounted. If you encounter *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, truly repent, reform your conduct, never repeat your misdeeds, widely circulate this work, and help others mend their ways, then the gates of hell shall close for you. Yet if you remain incredulous and unyielding, recklessly committing evil, you yourself will swing open the gates of hell, and no one can hold you back. Bear this in mind: when Earth Store Bodhisattva meets you in the hells, he wishes to see you walk the Bodhisattva path and enter the hells to liberate living beings — not to encounter you again because you suffer retribution for your evil karma!

All readers, take care! *Amitabha*!

Daolan, respectfully pressing palms together

To Safeguard the Nation and Cherish the People; Comprehend the Karmic Law of Cause and Effect Clearly

What is the true purpose of human life? Those in suffering endure hardship helplessly; those enjoying blessings create karmic deeds amid their comfort and will also undergo suffering in turn. All things are impermanent and fluctuating. If one fails to comprehend the karmic law of cause and effect, would not this precious human form be wasted in vain?

At the Dharma Assembly for Safeguarding the Nation and Alleviating Calamities, Master Yin Guang expounded that safeguarding the nation and cherishing the people hinges upon firmly believing in karma, adopting vegetarianism, releasing living beings, observing the precepts and reciting the Buddha's name. Master Yin Guang stated: "The catastrophes befalling the world today, together with all manner of afflictions we endure, are brought forth by unwholesome karmic deeds committed in the past, resulting in the bitter retributions we experience at present. If we wish to avoid bitter retributions, we must eradicate the causes of suffering. What are the causes of suffering? They are precisely the three poisons: greed, anger and ignorance. What constitute wholesome causes? They are aiding creatures and benefiting others. If every person thoroughly understands the principle of cause and effect, everyone will refrain from all evil and practise all good. Then all kinds of disasters will naturally cease to arise. Yet people nowadays are ignorant of karmic principles, their hearts filled with selfish desires. They stop at no evil, caring only for themselves and disregarding others. The law of cause and effect is the fundamental principle with which sage rulers govern the world and with which the Tathagata delivers all

sentient beings. The Buddha taught: “To know the causes of your past lives, look at what you undergo in this life. To know the fruits of your future lives, look at what you do in this life.” Yi Jing states: “A family that accumulates goodness shall enjoy lingering blessings; a family that accumulates evil shall incur lingering misfortune.” Shang Shu records: “For those who practise good, hundreds of blessings descend; for those who practise evil, hundreds of misfortunes befall.” These principles perfectly align with the doctrine of cause and effect taught by our Buddha.” Master Yin Guang’s sincere aspiration to safeguard the nation and cherish the people shines forth from his writing. Every utterance reveals ultimate truth, and every character embodies compassion.

The book *The Inexorable Nether Laws* lays bare the sufferings of retribution for evil karmic deeds to all people. Some claim that since many karmic retributions for evil do not manifest within this lifetime, the law of karma cannot be trusted. Thus they indulge their desires and act unscrupulously, ultimately harming others as well as themselves. They fail to understand that the karmic net stretches wide; nothing escapes its mesh. Karmic retribution spanning the three lifetimes runs through all ages. It is not that retribution will never come, but merely that the time has not yet arrived. This book opens such a skillful gateway, enabling people to recognize bitter karmic fruits and thereby eradicate their causes, and its authors hope that all will cease evil and practice virtue.

Regarding sexual misconduct, one of the causes of suffering, Master Yin Guang stated: “This conduct defies heavenly principles and disrupts human ethics. Those who engage in sexual misconduct are beasts clothed in human form while alive. After death, they fall into the three evil realms and evil paths and cannot escape for billions upon billions of kalpas.” A nation’s future rests upon its talents. What matters most for talents is their quality, and the core of quality lies in morality and ability. If multitudes indulge in sexual misconduct, corrupting virtue and impairing

their faculties, endless calamities will ensue. In this life, they suffer from feeble constitutions, premature aging and frequent illnesses. Women are prone to intractable gynecological ailments, even infertility. Widespread sexual misconduct gives rise to fractured and discordant families, separation of spouses and children, and endless resentment. People encounter setbacks in their careers, ruin their reputations, lose blessings and wealth, and face shortened lifespans. Youngsters who view obscene content and engage in masturbation and sexual misconduct waste their precious youth, ruining their morality and bodies. Young people represent a nation's future — how lamentable this is! Sexual misconduct is truly a hidden weapon that brings ruin to individuals and the nation alike. It destroys and harms people imperceptibly.

Question: What you state holds merit. Yet people may be persuaded and guided simply through rational reasoning. Why must so many descriptions of hellish punishments and gory scenes be presented, leaving people feeling frightened, oppressed and distressed? Furthermore, most people do not believe hell exists. Would this not obstruct the path of propagation itself?

Answer: A good medicine is one suited to the illness it treats. Most people in the present age no longer believe in the law of karma, let alone the law of karma spanning three lifetimes which they say is hard to see. This special skillful means is provided to help people understand that committing evil karma inevitably brings bitter karmic retribution. Thereby they may rectify their past misdeeds and amend their future conduct, avoiding falling into the evil realms. This book also contains abundant explanations on the law of karma. It places equal emphasis on principle and phenomena, with the two complementing and illuminating one another. It enables people to refrain from evil out of reverent fear, and once they cease wrongdoing, they can reform themselves. When this comes to pass, the gates of hell shall break open, and the path of Bodhi shall unfold.

Question: Is the book The Inexorable Nether Laws *authentic?"It exists if you believe in it; it does not if you do not." If I do not read it, I will feel more at ease.*

Answer: The saying "It exists if you believe in it; it does not if you do not" does not hold true; the principle applies equally to everyone. To judge whether the accounts in *The Inexorable Nether Laws* are true, we should take the law of cause and effect expounded by the Buddha as the criterion. The book elaborates only a small portion of karmic retributions in the hells in modern times, aiming to guide people toward goodness. Truth should not be judged merely by whether we have witnessed it personally or not, just as celestial bodies in outer space exist regardless of whether limited scientific knowledge in a certain era has discovered them. Does something remain non-existent simply because it cannot be observed temporarily? Strictly speaking, the fact that people have not perceived certain things for the time being does not prove they do not exist.

If everyone abides by their proper duties as human beings, there will inevitably be peace of body and mind, harmonious families and a tranquil society. A nation is built upon its people, and the foundation of people lies in virtue. As an ancient maxim states: A nation cannot flourish without virtue; a person cannot stand firm without moral integrity!

Daolan (respectfully with palms together)

The Inexorable Nether Laws

Volume II

WRITTEN BY
SHANGGUAN YUHUA



0 / Foreword by the Author

Amitabha! Greetings to all.

I am grateful to the Buddha for granting this humble learner the sacred opportunity to write *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. I, A Yu, am filled with deep remorse. Hindered by all manner of personal karmic obstacles, I failed to finish this book promptly in accordance with the will of the Buddhas and heaven. I sincerely repent before everyone. I will follow the spirit of Mahayana Bodhisattvas — great kindness without conditions and great compassion with the same body recognising the interconnected oneness of all beings — to continue writing the remaining parts of *The Inexorable Nether Laws*.

Since I started writing this book, on one hand, my scope of understanding has widened. On the other hand, I have experienced things that have never happened to me in this lifetime. All of these have greatly tested my mental resolve and have exhausted my spirit and energy. When my vitality declines, I am unable to travel to the hell realms. This slows my writing work and directly causes *The Inexorable Nether Laws* to remain unfinished for a long time.

The biggest realization brought by writing this book is a profound awareness of how important it is to uphold the precepts. Many people feel observing precepts is something far away, merely the duty of those monastic practitioners and irrelevant to ordinary beings. Such a viewpoint runs contrary to the law of karma and the laws of the netherworld. In truth, all greatly accomplished cultivators must carefully abide by all precepts in accordance with the Dharma even while they are still ordinary beings cultivating the causes for enlightenment.

Upholding the precepts is the foundation of being a human being. Anyone who observes the Five Precepts will abound in manifold merits and virtues. Anyone who breaks the precepts

cannot escape the sanctions of the nether laws, which diminish one's blessings and lifespan. If the transgressor is a Buddhist who ought to uphold the precepts, an additional offence of breaking precepts will be incurred, and all resultant bitter fruits must be endured by oneself in the future.

Another profound realization of this humble learner concerns the Buddha's immense compassionate power. This supreme compassionate power can guide us suffering living beings to transcend suffering and attain bliss. We only need to dwell in gratitude, sincerely recite the Buddha's name and repent our karmic obstructions. Through such practice, the dark karmic offences that would bring torment in the hells due to our past evil deeds can be eliminated.

All of us are ordinary beings, and naturally we have harbored erroneous thoughts and committed improper deeds in the past. As soon as we recognise our mistakes and inappropriate conduct, we ought to rectify them immediately, never repeating such wrongs. For the rest of our lives, we should earnestly uphold the pure precepts, practise good deeds, accumulate virtues, recite the Buddha's name and release living beings until the end of our lifespan. Even if we fail to attain rebirth in the Pure Land, the Nether Sovereign Yama King will certainly mete out lenient judgment and pardon our karmic offences.

These are merely a few reflections of this humble learner Ayù, written down to share with all fellow practitioners.

Here I sincerely wish all sentient beings on Jambudvīpa may live pure lives, refrain from sexual misconduct throughout their lifetimes, cultivate the Dharma purely alongside their spouses, and be blessed with abundant virtuous affinities.

I also wish all sentient beings throughout the Dharma realm of empty space can uphold and accomplish pure precepts, bring forth the great Bodhi mind, refrain from all evil, practise all good, diligently cultivate through Buddha-recitation, attain purity of

body and mind, and achieve rebirth by transformation in a lotus flower.

Respectfully written by Shangguan Yuhua, the humble learner

1 / The Register of Life and Death

From what I witnessed, the Register of Life and Death is pale yellow, adorned with linear patterns on its cover, bearing three characters “Register of Life and Death”. It is bound in the ancient thread-bound book style.

The pale yellow volume records all fortunes and misfortunes experienced by souls during their mortal lives. The Magistrate also holds a dark red volume of the Register of Life and Death, which documents detailed information of souls within the netherworld. Its binding and styling are identical to the pale yellow one; only the color differs.

2 / Everything Was Written Down Long Ago! — Secrets of Human Destiny and the Adjustment of Lifespans: Revealing Heavenly Mysteries from the Register of Life and Death

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"Amitabha!"*Ayù*pressed her palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. "Magistrate, I wish to ask several questions today. Legend has it that some mortals can go to the netherworld to consult the Register of Life and Death. Is this true? Does the Register of Life and Death truly exist? What kind of record is it? I have heard fortune-tellers for the living can predict matters recorded within it. Is a person's livelihood and sustenance — all they will eat and wear — predetermined before birth? If a person's lifespan is fixed at birth, can practices such as maintaining physical health, regular daily routines, moderate diet, and frequent exercise extend the allotted years of life? Or can the predetermined lifespan never be altered? Can destiny be changed? Is it possible to attain longer life through prayers for longevity? Are there limits to how much lifespan may be increased or reduced? Thank you, Magistrate!"

The Magistrate replied, "Truly, some mortals in the human world can come to the netherworld to consult the Register of Life and Death. Naturally, those capable of such a journey are no ordinary people; they must possess special karmic affinities. Mortals whose lifespans have not yet ended cannot enter the netherworld. Broadly speaking, there are two categories of living beings who arrive in the netherworld. The first type of mortal people come driven by karmic force. These beings committed various evil deeds worthy of hellish retribution while alive. Drawn by their karmas, they arrive involuntarily. In summary,

their misdeeds fall into three categories: bodily, verbal and mental karma. Bodily karma covers the three major transgressions: killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. Verbal karma includes four offences: false speech, frivolous speech, harsh speech and divisive speech. Mental karma consists of three poisons: greed, anger and ignorance.

"The mortal beings mentioned above who commit the three evil deeds of bodily karma, four evil deeds of verbal karma, and the three evil deeds of mental karma will have their souls return to the netherworld once their lives end. I have only outlined this briefly; there exist numerous detailed subdivisions which I shall not elaborate on here. Additionally, there are also mortal beings whose deeds in life are mixed — neither purely good nor purely evil. Upon passing away, they will be reborn in the common ghost quarters in the ghost path. They also belong to this first category.

"The second type of mortal people arrive empowered by the Buddhas' power, vows, blessings and virtues. Such mortals are invariably cultivators bearing special missions within the human world. These cultivators uphold pure precepts diligently, deliver suffering beings as conditions arise, and guide sentient beings to attain freedom from affliction. They propagate the true Dharma far and wide to rescue all beings. When such cultivators need to save sentient beings, they may go to the netherworld to consult the Register of Life and Death, yet occurrences of this kind are extremely rare.

"The Register of Life and Death falls under the jurisdiction of magistrates of the netherworld and is usually held in their hands. It records the weight of each being's karmic blessings: how much one eats and wears, lands, houses, wealth, parents, siblings and relatives, illnesses, disasters, tribulations, as well as one's lifespan in thorough detail.

"For instance, it records precisely the year, month, day, hour and minute when a person's life shall end, and the place of passing. These entries are written before rebirth into the human

realm and cannot be altered arbitrarily. Any revision requires data provided by the attendant deities accompanying each being, followed by approval from the supreme Yama King of the netherworld.

“Fortune-tellers among mortals can perceive matters documented within the Register of Life and Death. With a person’s accurate Four Pillars and Eight Characters of birth, fortune-tellers may foretell auspicious and calamitous events throughout the person’s lifetime. Still, they are only able to foresee destiny, never change it. Many individuals in the human world claim they can change fate, wealth, marriage, careers and more. The majority of these claims are merely commercial tactics devised to amass money. Numerous people are shocked when fortune-tellers accurately recount their past events or the number of family members, and mistakenly believe they have met an accomplished master. Aside from some fortune-tellers proficient in esoteric calculations who can predict a person’s prosperity and adversity, in many cases the fortune-tellers are possessed by spirits.

“Souls possess spiritual powers such as mind reading. They can perceive the thoughts and ideas of the querent, as well as some past events the querent has experienced. Nevertheless, those who seek divination are unable to tell the difference. They rejoice at having met a so-called master and submit unconditionally to the fortune-teller. Afterwards, they pay for a series of services claimed to alter their fortune: enhancing interpersonal luck, career prospects, marital fate and health, alongside setting up feng shui formations, all in pursuit of a full elevation of their destiny. Little do they know they squander vast sums of money and considerable time, yet their predetermined destiny remains wholly unchanged. Disasters still come, illnesses still afflict them, and ultimately, they will still die.

“To alter destiny, you must not ask fortune-tellers to change it for you. True transformation of fate depends entirely on yourself. Accumulate virtuous deeds and seek blessings through your own

conduct; then there is no need to consult fortune-tellers. Blessed people naturally receive aid from noble benefactors, attaining fulfillment in health, family, career, marital bonds and so forth. Others can at most serve as reminders from the sidelines. You must put good deeds into practice yourself, keeping them constantly in mind and continuing day and night without interruption. Then your predetermined destiny can be changed, and your entry in the Register of Life and Death can be rewritten from then on!

"Ayù, you ought to understand this. Even if people devote their whole lives to preserving their health through regular routines, moderate diets, sufficient sleep, and physical activity, such efforts cannot extend their allotted lifespans. These self-disciplined activities alone lack the power to alter their fixed destiny. Naturally, thanks to their diligent self-care, they will suffer less physical agony when illness befalls them.

"In truth, the vast majority of sentient beings cannot greatly transform their destiny. They live ordinary lives until death, then transmigrate to corresponding paths or realms according to the karmas they have created. Nevertheless, whenever any sentient being practises goodness — even a seemingly trivial act of virtue — if their original intention is genuinely to benefit others, such virtuous acts may yield immense wholesome rewards in time, thereby turning the course of their destiny. Two kinds of people can divert the trajectory of predetermined fate: those who commit grave evil and those who practice great good. Those of grave evil descend straight to the hells to receive karmic retribution after death. By contrast, those of great good possess filial piety that moves heaven, quietly accumulate hidden virtues, and relieve suffering for others. Their blessing rewards expand boundlessly. They may break free from their original predetermined fate and continuously ascend, to be reborn in the heaven realms and enjoy blessings and bliss after passing away.

"As for your question on seeking longer life, it can be achieved, yet there is a limit to how much one's lifespan may be extended. Hence one must seek longevity in accordance with principle and the Dharma. Seeking longevity in such a proper way means this: if your body is frail and you wish to nourish your physical form with nourishing food, you must never take the lives of animals to sustain your body. Heaven cherishes all living beings. To preserve one's own life by slaying other sentient beings is strictly prohibited by the laws of the netherworld. Such ways of nourishing the body cannot prolong life; on the contrary, you will incur karmic debts for the lives you have taken, which will inevitably bring bitter retribution in the future. All who seek longer life must bear this firmly in mind: first and foremost, adopt a vegetarian diet. If you take the lives of other beings, how can you hope for longevity? When lives are unjustly taken, the victims will harbor resentment and wait for an opportunity to retaliate. Therefore, vegetarianism is the foundation for extending lifespan. Furthermore, those who seek longevity should nurture a great compassionate mind to liberate all living beings from suffering and grant them joy, bring forth the great Bodhi mind to save countless beings, and uphold vegetarian practice throughout their lives and engage in releasing captive creatures. If one truly fulfills these practices, one's allotted lifespan recorded on the Register of Life and Death will certainly be increased. The amount of extended years is determined by the scope of one's aspiration and the volume of meritorious virtues accumulated.

"According to the records within the registers of life and death in my custody, there are some people who receive an extension of lifespan without actively praying for it. Some are ordinary people without the grand mind to rescue all sentient beings. They simply possess a sincere heart to aid others. When witnessing injustice or crises, compassion arises within them, and they save another being's life. Such people are reported regularly by the attendant deities and successfully granted longer lives, without themselves

knowing their lifespan has been lengthened. Extensions of lifespan in such cases generally range from six to twelve years. For beings who have amassed exceptionally profound hidden meritorious virtues, the blessing rewards may exceed what they can enjoy within a single lifetime, and these meritorious virtues will then be carried over across successive incarnations to grant them long lives in future lifetimes. Human lifespans are predetermined, thus rewards and punishments under the netherworld laws never violate the natural order."

Then I ventured another question to the Magistrate: "In the sutras, the Buddha instructs cultivators to eat lightly, sleep little, and even forego sleep for spiritual cultivation. Does this harm one's health or shorten lifespan?"

The Magistrate replied: "The Buddha is a cultivator possessing supreme wisdom in the universe. The path of cultivation we follow is the very path the Buddha traversed step by step. Having walked this path, the Buddha naturally knows how to guide living beings along it. The cultivation methods taught by the Buddha will not harm one's health or shorten one's lifespan. Only offenses committed through body, mouth and mind, or later neglect of one's body, such as reckless overeating, reversed day-night routines, uncontrolled emotions and so forth, can diminish one's lifespan.

"Eating lightly and sleeping modestly are excellent ways to cultivate the body. Mortals in the human realm are capable of surviving without food or sleep. If a person can align every breath with nature and attain unity between humanity and heaven, they will naturally enjoy robust health and longevity. They can then live independent of food and slumber, returning to the luminous state prior to reincarnation. Ordinary people, however, cannot achieve this state. This is why the Buddha guides practitioners to advance gradually: begin by eating less, for eating less naturally leads to sleeping less. In time, one can cultivate diligently without sleep.

"As I stated before, how much a person consumes in this lifetime is predetermined prior to rebirth. Eating lightly now allows one to conserve and accumulate the blessing rewards allotted for this life. If one perseveres in diligent practice, eating lightly, sleeping little, or even foregoing sleep entirely, greater blessing rewards and virtuous fruits will be accumulated over time. How then could restrained eating and sleepless cultivation possibly shorten one's lifespan? Now, Ayù, do you understand?" I nodded to show comprehension.

The Magistrate said: "That shall be all for today. You are welcome to return with further questions!"

"Very well! *Amitabha*! Thank you, Honourable Magistrate!"

I pressed my palms together respectfully to the Magistrate, then departed by white lotus flower!

3 / At Last Beholding the Fabled Karma-Manifesting Mirror — No One Is Good Before the Platform of the Karma-Manifesting Mirror!

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"Amitabha!"*Ayù*pressed her palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. "Magistrate, I have a question today. What is the legendary platform of the karma-manifesting mirror like? When I was young, I often heard my elders say that after people pass away, they must stand before this mirror in the netherworld. I wonder if this tale holds true. I long to witness it."

The Magistrate explained, "The platform of the karma-manifesting mirror is crafted specifically for those who commit evil karmas. Within every being's mind resides something like a karma-manifesting recorder. All virtuous and evil deeds performed by mortals each day are recorded and captured. The attendant deities also keep track of every action in secret. The platform of the karma-manifesting mirror is made of sacred wood and crystalline treasure from the human realm, condensed by the yin-yang miraculous qi of heaven and earth. The yang qi represents brightness and good karma, while the yin qi stands for darkness and evil karma. If people in the human world practice good deeds throughout life, their souls radiate light. When they stand before the karma-manifesting mirror, only radiance appears with no images shown. Hence virtuous people need not face this mirror. Yet if people commit any evil deeds in life, no matter how secret, they know them clearly in their hearts. All such deeds are stored within the ālaya-vijñāna, the inner mind mirror, casting shadows within.

The platform of the karma-manifesting mirror is formed from the fusion of yin and yang energies. When it encounters the evil karma of a condemned soul, the yin qi resonates instantly, projecting all the evil acts the spirit committed in its lifetime. Every misdeed is laid bare without omission, leaving nowhere to hide.

As stated in the Avatamsaka Sutra:

'If one wishes to understand

All Buddhas of past, present and future,

One should contemplate the nature of the Dharma realm;

Everything is created solely by the mind.' This is a projection of the mind.

Once a condemned soul stands before the platform of the karma-manifesting mirror, every secret misdeed, great and small, committed throughout its lifetime will be displayed one after another. When all hidden evils perpetrated by the spirit are projected on the mirror, all beings gathered around the platform can witness every wicked act simultaneously. Many condemned souls are overwhelmed with shame, remorse and terror. Yet repentance is of no avail at this stage. Helplessly, they are dragged away by fierce ghost officers to endure prolonged torment in the hells.

If people in the human world practice goodness and accumulate virtues throughout their lives, living upright and open lives without hidden transgressions, they possess the supreme goodness and pure yang energy. When they approach the platform of the karma-manifesting mirror, nothing appears upon its surface. Those who practice goodness all their lives need not stand before this mirror. After death, they ascend directly according to the radiance of their spiritual nature. The brighter one's spiritual nature, the higher one ascends. Some depart for a certain Buddhaland or pure land with which they have karmic affinities; others are escorted by virtuous divinities to the heavenly realms. Souls of neither good nor evil will undergo

judgment by the Yama Kings of the Ten Halls before being reborn in the mortal world. Whether they are reborn as male or female, wealthy or poor, blessed with long life or destined for an early death, all depends on the extent of their blessings. Those who have committed evil karma must come before the mirror, where all their misdeeds are revealed. They are then led away in shame and helplessness by ghost wardens."

"Ayù, follow me to view the Hall of the Karma Manifesting Mirror."

"I obey, Magistrate."

A crowd of figures came into sight ahead. A huge oval mirror stood before us. The Magistrate told me this was the Platform of the Karma-Manifesting Mirror. The inscription "No One Is Good Before the Platform of the Karma-Manifesting Mirror" was written at the top. The Magistrate asked me to take measurements.

The platform stood approximately 3.3 meters high and 1.8 meters wide. The mirror rested upon a rectangular turquoise wooden base carved with embossed patterns. Its face was formed of crystalline treasure, framed by embossed turquoise wooden ornamentation. This crystalline surface acted as a great screen projecting all the sinful deeds of condemned souls. The carved turquoise wood glimmered with faint eerie light. Coupled with the ferocious, grim ghost officers standing nearby, the scene inspired profound dread. As hidden evils unknown to others during the souls' mortal lives unfolded on the mirror, the evidence stood plain for all to see. The sight chilled the heart to the core, intensifying the horror tenfold.

These condemned souls here had all just passed away, and they could already sense the aura of the underworld. Most wore gloomy, dejected looks. Just then, I heard a man shout, "I never committed murder or arson in my life! Why drag me here? Let me out!" Two ferocious ghost officers seized the man and shoved him violently toward the Platform of the Karma-Manifesting Mirror. The man was forced to his knees in agony.

The grand karmic mirror instantly revealed scenes of his rampant sexual misconduct throughout his life, involving multiple women; the sights were utterly repulsive. This constituted extreme licentiousness, which drove his lawful wife to waste away and die of sorrow in bed. Fortunately, such visions could not affect me; otherwise I would have felt the urge to cleanse my eyes after witnessing them. By this point, the condemned soul's legs trembled uncontrollably, and the ghost officers dragged him away.

Next was a female condemned soul. She appeared refined and pleasant in appearance. I wondered what transgressions she had committed. The karmic mirror showed that she had followed her friend in slandering a strictly precept-abiding male lay Buddhist who propagated the Dharma. This woman herself studied Buddhadharma and possessed extensive knowledge of the teachings. Sadly, consumed by jealousy, she deliberately spread slander against the virtuous layman, falsely claiming he had raped a certain person. Her slander took root, and people ceased coming to listen to his Dharma talks. The lay Buddhist had no choice but to retreat into seclusion for cultivation.

Her slander against him was far more vicious than that of her friend. Her friend lacked profound Dharma understanding and wisdom, merely echoing others' accusations. In contrast, this female soul schemed relentlessly and deployed every means to defame the layman, ultimately forcing him into seclusion.

As a karmic consequence of her slander, she developed throat cancer along with complications. Pus constantly oozed from her mouth and nose. She endured intravenous drips in hospital until she succumbed to her suffering. Now that disaster loomed before her eyes, the female soul dropped to her knees and begged for mercy. A vicious ghost officer jabbed her mouth with a trident and roared, "Will you dare slander the true Dharma and sever others' wisdom lives again? Now you shall stand before the Yama King!"

This female soul was truly pitiable. If she had foreseen such consequences, she would never have acted as she did. Undermining the propagation of the true Dharma cuts off living beings' path to liberation, a grave karmic offence that incurs hellish retribution. The karmic laws of the netherworld impose a wide array of punishments for slanderers. By the time they finish enduring these hellish retributions, who knows what year or month it will be, or what the world will be like?

A long queue stretched out behind them. All the condemned souls lined up, endless in number, waiting to stand before the Platform of the Karma-Manifesting Mirror. It was clear that far too many people in the human realm commit evil deeds.

Due to limited time today, I only witnessed a small number of cases. Observing the scenes at the Platform of the Karma-Manifesting Mirror was rather taxing, for all visions shown depicted violations of precepts. Apart from being unsuitable for children, there were numerous horrifying and bloody scenes: murders with flowing blood, all manner of cruel harm inflicted upon others, scheming and intrigue, and much more. Alas! There was no opportunity to question every condemned soul one by one, nor did I wish to describe everything in excessive detail. Were I to recount every sight fully, this book *The Inexorable Nether Laws* would undoubtedly become an intensely terrifying volume.

Ultimately, everyone ought to cherish the precious human body, observe the five precepts and the ten good deeds to accumulate abundant blessings and virtues, and at the very least, to strive to retain this human body. Never fall into the hell realms; suffering there is unbearable beyond measure. Even half a minute spent there is agonizing.

The Magistrate said: "We shall conclude for today. Ayù, return first to write your writings to warn all people to cultivate the body and foster the nature, and diligently practise virtuous deeds. Do not commit evils that lead to hell rebirth under the delusion that no mortal or divine being will discover your actions. Bear in mind

that before the Platform of the Karma-Manifesting Mirror, every evil deed, great or small, shall be revealed without exception. May all beings refrain from incurring the merciless sanctions of the netherworld laws!"

"*Amitabha*! Gratitude to the Honourable Judge!"

I pressed my palms together respectfully to the Magistrate, then departed riding upon a white lotus flower!

4 / The Supreme Ruler of the Underworld: the Nether Sovereign Yama King

I now faithfully describe Great Emperor Fengdu's appearance exactly as I beheld him.

The supreme ruler of the netherworld is Great Emperor Fengdu, the Nether Sovereign Yama King. He is tall, robust and imposing, bearing an air of solemn majesty. He has a round face with regular features, wide glaring eyes, and brows radiating awe-inspiring dignity.

The Emperor wears a gentle smile toward virtuous beings, softening his countenance. Yet when facing condemned souls, he turns exceptionally stern and wrathful. His brows and eyes arch sharply upward, striking fear into all who behold him.

When he rebukes condemned souls, his voice is deafening. His eyes, already large, widen further in anger. He opens his mouth wide and slams his table forcefully, thoroughly overwhelming the souls with terror. He always gives an impression of being unapproachable.

Upon his head rests an ancient official-style hat fitted with rectangular front and back hanging veils. The rectangular frame is black, while the veils are white. The hat carries tremendous grandeur, adorned with a map depicting the mountains and rivers of the human world woven in five colors. At the centre of the hat sits a red gemstone. Flanking the gem lie undulating blue ocean patterns. Above the oceans stretches an ochre expanse of land, dotted with green forests and lofty mountains. The whole design is magnificently crafted, encapsulating all mountains, rivers and lands of the human realm upon a single hat.

The imperial robe worn by the Great Emperor is adorned with a vibrantly colored Diagram of the Six Realms of Rebirth. Circular in shape, the diagram is equally split into five segments. At the very top lie the Heaven Realm and the Asura Realm, where male and female celestial beings fly through the air and asuras wage war against heavenly troops. Directly opposite the Heaven Realm lies the Hell Realm. Within it, sinful souls suffer torment: boiled in oil cauldrons, beaten by ghost officers, and forced to embrace scorching copper pillars. Clockwise adjacent to the Heaven Realm is the Human Realm, populated by three groups of beings: the wealthy, laborers and poor farmers. Further clockwise below the human realm is the ghost realm, home to big-bellied hungry ghosts, emaciated starving ghosts, smoke-fire ghosts and others. Across from the ghost realm dwell all manner of beasts, domestic fowl and wild creatures of the animal realm.

5 / The Nether Edict for Soul Entities — Ox-Head and Horse-Face Elaborate the Entire Process of Handling Mortals upon the End of Their Lives

Lately, it seems that the weather in many cities of the human world shifts in an instant, especially in coastal regions. One moment, the sun blazes overhead, its scorching heat leaving people drenched in sweat; the next, gusts rise and torrential rain pours down. Anyone out with a slightly small umbrella may find it flipped inside out by the wind, soaked to the skin. Such erratic weather recurs several times a day as of late. For those dwelling along the coast, wind and wave conditions fluctuate even more drastically. Those with weaker immunity easily catch colds, and many around complain about the foul, sweltering weather and poor air quality.

Stepping into shopping malls and office buildings of all sizes, one is met with bitterly cold air conditioning. This constant swing between heat and chill takes a toll on everyone. All hope the weather will settle and improve, yet for all their wishes, climatic conditions remain unchanged. Humans always desire everything around them to be favorable, yet most overlook how they treat nature day by day.

We consume countless disposable products each day, such as chopsticks, paper tissues and assorted elaborate packaging, continuously generating pollutants. As we indulge in exquisitely crafted daily necessities, home appliances, furniture, genuine leather sofas, leather garments, silk apparel and ornate decorations, do we pause to reflect that we merely spend money to acquire these goods, yet behind these polished, beautiful items lies the sacrifice of countless unknown, pitiful living beings, or

immense expenditure of manpower and resources? Are these beings sacrificed ruthlessly to serve humanity truly willing to become feasts for people, or to have their skins stripped and worn as clothing? If we could ask these creatures, surely they would refuse. This is one major factor behind the harm inflicted upon sentient beings and environmental degradation.

The second factor is human thoughts and ideas. Riding public transport or walking along streets each day, we see countless people whose faces betray exhaustion, sorrow, vexation, anxiety and fear. In truth, many people have spirits attached to them, making it extremely difficult for them to live happily and smoothly.

We humans constantly radiate all manner of negative thoughts and ideas. Animals slaughtered for food likewise emit powerful sentiments of resentment born from life-and-death suffering. These vengeful emotions linger in the surrounding space. The souls lie in wait to retaliate, ready to unleash all kinds of disasters upon humanity at any time. Our thoughts and ideas directly shape climatic shifts across nature. The changes in weather we experience now are the karmic retribution brought forth by our daily mental states. Hence a sutra states: “Contemplate the nature of the Dharma realm; all things are created by the mind alone.”

Namo Amitabha! Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha, I departed riding a white lotus flower.

I caught sight of the two underworld messengers, Ox-Head and Horse-Face, ahead. I wondered where they were bound. I decided to go over and greet them.

“*Amitabha*! May I ask where you two, Ox-Head and Horse-Face, are heading?”

Ox-Head replied, “Oh! Ayù, you have come. Has *The Inexorable Nether Laws* been finished?”

“I am ashamed. I must strive harder. I will complete it as soon as possible. Thank you both for your concern. I see you two are constantly busy every time we meet. May I ask whether your work

brings pressure? Would you be dismissed by the Nether Sovereign Yama King if you mistakenly apprehend the wrong person? You always look stern. Why not smile? Experts say maintaining a joyful state of mind improves health and relieves stress!"

Ox-Head said: "Ox-Head and Horse-Face serve as frontline personnel of the netherworld. Every day we receive numerous mortal death notices issued by the netherworld, namely the nether edict for soul entities, referred to simply as the nether edict.

"The nether edict for soul entities comes in two colors: pale yellow and dark crimson. Pale yellow nether edicts are carried by officials of the Good Reward Division and Evil Punishment Division of the netherworld to the mortal realm, to escort the souls of the deceased into the netherworld. Only dark crimson nether edicts are wielded by us Ox-Head and Horse-Face. A pale yellow edict signifies that the deceased mortal possessed abundant good karma. A dark crimson one indicates heavy evil karma, meaning the spirit shall descend into various hells to receive punishment.

"The contents of the nether edict for soul entities are as follows: XX of the human world shall pass away at XX location, at exactly XX hours, XX minutes and XX seconds on XX date, XX month, XX year. Detailed records of the cause of demise will be documented. We will seize the soul-entity at the exact time and location specified and escort it back to the netherworld to receive punishment. When encountering recalcitrant soul entities, we will act sternly and force them into the netherworld. The place and circumstances of every mortal's passing differ. Most succumb to illness and draw their last breath in hospital beds. Hospitals are therefore places where many mortals meet their end, which is why we often go there to apprehend soul entities and bring them to justice.

"We almost never seize the wrong spirit. The edict reveals the entire course of the mortal's death in advance, and we preview the death process once when we receive the edict. Before a mortal's demise, their body radiates an aura of light, varying in

brightness and darkness from person to person. The brighter the aura, the greater the virtuous deeds the mortal has cultivated; he may even be a pure cultivator. If the mortal's bodily light fades completely and is shrouded by the black light of hell, this spirit is the one we Ox-Head and Horse-Face must take back to the netherworld. With these two signs, mistakes are rare. Should we mistakenly apprehend a spirit, we immediately send it back to the mortal realm, and the Nether Sovereign Yama King will conduct a thorough investigation and settle the matter accordingly.

"The Nether Sovereign Yama King imposes strict penalties upon beings who transgress the precepts. Nevertheless, if our error is unintentional, the Nether Sovereign Yama King grants us a chance to reform. Every event that unfolds arises from a chain of causes and conditions. Still, we carry out our duties with great caution. Repeated wrongful arrests stemming from carelessness would spark tragedies for mortal families. Even if the Nether Sovereign Yama King refrains from punishing us, we ourselves would bear a heavy karmic debt. Generally, we arrive at the scene before the mortal's passing to survey the surroundings and verify the soul's identity to avoid error.

"Nearly all soul entities we apprehend nowadays for passing away are mortals who have violated the precept against sexual misconduct. Any soul-entity escorted back by us must have committed grave karmic evils worthy of hell retribution in their lifetime. Innumerable mortals in the present world commit sexual transgressions, and their soul entities carry dense, unwholesome sexual energy. Witnessing this, how could we possibly smile?

"Some of these condemned souls tainted by sexual evil still emanate lustful thoughts even after death, formed by long-ingrained habits. We must adopt a stern bearing to rouse their awareness, letting them know their human blessing rewards have been exhausted. They ought to repent sincerely and undergo punishment in hell.

"We wish we could smile, yet we cannot. Only when *The Inexorable Nether Laws* circulates widely among mortals, when all people uphold moral ethics after reading it and cease creating hellish evil karmas, and when all hells are emptied — only then can we smile.

"Nowadays, ever more mortals of the human world fall into hell, and our workload grows heavier. Ayù, please finish writing *The Inexorable Nether Laws* as soon as possible. May this virtuous publication guide humanity toward goodness and avert numerous future disasters upon the mortal world."

"*Amitabha*! We have official duties to attend to; we shall converse another day. Continue your tour. We take our leave now, farewell!"

Amitabha! Ox-Head and Horse-Face moved with astonishing speed, already out of sight. Though every staff member of the netherworld appears fierce, they uphold justice and possess a strong sense of responsibility. I must return and hasten my writing.

Namo Amitabha! I returned home riding on a white lotus flower.

6 / Righteousness and Evil Are Ever Opposed as Ice and Charcoal; Slander and Praise Now Reveal Truth and Falsehood — An Interview with Yue Fei, the Great National Hero, Recounting Events of Bygone Years

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"Amitabha!"*Ayù*pressed her palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. "Magistrate, today I wish to ask you to take me to visit General Yue Fei. Many legends about the General circulate in the human realm. When I was young at school, my teacher praised General Yue Fei."

The Magistrate said: "Yue Fei is a general of the netherworld now. Ayù, follow me. I shall take you to his General's Mansion, and you can interview him yourself."

We arrived! My heart thrilled with nervous excitement. Before us stood an ancient building resembling a temple. At its centre were the words: General Yue Fei's Mansion. Four yakshas armed with weapons stood guard at the scarlet main gate. One yaksha saluted the Magistrate upon seeing him.

The Magistrate instructed the yaksha to announce our arrival to the general, and explained, "Shangguan Yuhua, a Buddhist lay cultivator from the mortal realm, is tasked by the netherworld to compile *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. The work aims to purify mortal customs and liberate suffering sentient beings trapped in transgressions. She needs to collect information via interviews in the netherworld. Shangguan Yuhua has come to pay her respects to the General and interview him. Kindly pass this message on."

The yaksha immediately went ahead into the mansion to report. Another yaksha led us into the front hall and invited us to

sit and take tea while we waited. A doorway in this hall led deeper within, and we took our seats to await audience.

This place bore no resemblance to hell; it felt like an official's residence, with patrolling yaksha guards on duty. Presently the yaksha who met us at the gate returned. He said the General would hold a meeting shortly, yet had time to receive us beforehand. The yaksha then guided us into the inner hall.

The inner hall was far larger than the front hall. At its centre were four large characters that looked like running script: Serve the Country with Utmost Loyalty. These calligraphic characters emanated an aura and magnetic field that upheld justice. Dynamic and stirring, they inspired a profound sense of righteousness that tugged at the heart! A writing desk sat in the middle of the great hall, where the General was seated. I pressed my palms together and bowed to General Yue Fei.

"Shangguan Yuhua, a commoner, pays her respects to the General!"

General Yue Fei: "Rise. No need for formalities, Shangguan Yuhua. Speak your mind freely."

General Yue Fei's complexion was swarthy, his countenance stern. Yet he was not as fierce-looking as many Yama Kings of the Netherworld. There was a solemn dignity about him, saturated with a sense of justice. He wore the grey robes of a netherworld official.

General Yue Fei: "Shangguan Yuhua, you must faithfully complete *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. Let mortal beings in the human world understand that those who commit hellish evil karma shall inevitably fall and endure boundless karmic suffering. To sink into hell is easy, yet to escape is exceedingly difficult. What questions do you wish to put to me?"

Ayù: "Yes, General! Numerous legends about you remain widespread in the human world. For example, who caused your death? Was it Qin Hui, or the Emperor? How do you view the injustice you suffered back then, and what are your thoughts now?

Is the eternally celebrated ci poem Man Jiang Hong truly your creation? There is a legend stating you are the reincarnation of Zhang Fei from the Three Kingdoms period. Is this account true? I wish to pose these questions to you. Furthermore, you are serving as a general in the netherworld at present. Where can Qin Hui be found? I humbly ask the General to clear up my doubts."

General Yue Fei: "I was indeed slain by Qin Hui during my mortal lifetime. At first, Qin Hui was simply jealous of me. He begrudged the Emperor's high regard for my devotion to the nation. He constantly schemed and spoke to the Sovereign to hinder my battle plans. On numerous occasions right before battles, he raised objections against my strategies, yet his attempts ended in failure time and again.

"I never thought he would harbor murderous intentions back then. I merely thought Qin Hui was driven by jealousy, and that our ways of handling affairs simply differed. Disagreements inevitably arose at work due to conflicting perspectives. I believed he only yearned to achieve great deeds to earn the Sovereign's special favour.

"In hindsight, I misjudged Qin Hui completely. I merely thought our approaches diverged, and thus took almost no precautions against him. My whole heart was set upon serving the nation with unwavering loyalty. I thought that when people differed in their ways of doing things, mutual forbearance would see conflicts fade away. I focused on the bigger picture — how to defend our homeland. Personal grudges and struggles were never worth dwelling on, nor was there any need to quarrel over trivial matters. My heart was utterly sincere, and I saw no need for explanations. A true man ought to prove his innocence through deeds.

"I harbored no resentment when I was put to death. Victory and defeat are common in warfare. I might prevail today, yet face death upon defeat tomorrow; such things could happen at any time. The timing matters little. What counts is that my sacrifice

carries meaning, and my death brings no dishonor to the nation. Though I was framed and killed, I accepted the order to die. I feared death not in the slightest.

"As I drew near my end, I still bore in mind my mother's teaching to serve the country faithfully. The thought filled me with sorrow. As a son, I had yet to repay my mother for raising me, nor fully fulfilled my duty of loyalty to the nation. The realm would lose one warrior who truly strove to protect its people. In my final thought, I vowed that if reincarnation awaited me, I would better uphold the duty of loyal service to my country. Then I was executed. I bear hatred toward no one. I do not resent Qin Hui for plotting against me with slander, nor do I blame the Sovereign for his lack of discernment and ordering the execution of a loyal subject. None of these things hold any importance to me now.

"When I passed away and arrived at the judgment hall of the netherworld, the Nether Sovereign Yama King saw that I held no resentment or desire for vengeance despite being wrongfully killed. As I remained devoted to protecting the homeland until my last breath, he appointed me as a general of the netherworld. I oversee military affairs here. Three months before wars break out in the human world, the netherworld makes preparations for the conflicts in advance.

"Every war in the human world stems from collective karma and fixed karma formed by people's past acts of killing creatures. Ordinarily, fixed karma cannot be altered. To truly change fixed karma, one needs the power of great good karma to transform it. Generally speaking, only with the power of the Buddhas together with tremendous wholesome karma force can people stand a chance of changing their fixed karmas. Even so, such change can merely minimize the destructive impact of fixed karma. Nowadays, people are inclined toward unwholesomeness, making fixed karma extremely hard to change. That is why the publication of *The Inexorable Nether Laws* is a good thing, for it can guide and transform people's minds.

“Before mortal wars erupt, the netherworld army arranges all relevant details ahead of time, such as which side will win and the casualty toll. All arrangements are made in accordance with past karmic causes and effects. Even before fighting begins in the human realm, the outcome is already settled by the netherworld. My duty is to deploy troops and manage all matters arising during wars.

“Wars in the netherworld differ greatly from mortal wars. People in the human realm possess physical flesh and blood; wounds may lead to lifelong disability or death. By contrast, conflicts in the netherworld are battles of spiritual power and mental resolve — an entirely different matter.

“For crimes including persecuting loyal officials and corruption, Qin Hui now endures punishment in Mount Tai Hell. Once his sentence there concludes, he will be sent to the tongue-pulling hell, arrow-shooting hell and other hells to receive further punishment. Qin Hui accumulated grave unwholesome karmas during his mortal life. It will be an extremely long time before he can escape the sufferings of hell and gain freedom.

“Even so, I hope he may be freed from hellish torment soon. After all, we once served the same ruler and lived within the same nation; our official positions merely differed. To me, that is of little consequence. Everyone ought to faithfully fulfill their duties, safeguard the nation, and bring peace to common folk. Personal life and death, joy and comfort are trivial. One needs only three daily meals and a bed to rest. There is no need for excessive cravings. What truly matters is to bring benefit to countless ordinary people.

“How vital people’s hearts and thoughts are! I and Qin Hui both reside in the netherworld now, yet our circumstances could not be more vastly different. I remain occupied each day with various military arrangements. Some subordinates who followed me in the human world continue to serve under me here after they

passed away. By contrast, Qin Hui dwells in the netherworld enduring boundless, age-long torment in the hells.

"I urge all people in the human world, especially officials: never accept bribes, bend the law for personal gain, or abuse public power for private interests. If you neglect your duties, deceive the nation, exploit common folk and treat ordinary people as worthless, failing to seek wellbeing for your compatriots, you may evade mortal law while alive, yet you cannot escape the inexorable laws of the netherworld after death. If you serve the nation loyally, cherish the people as you cherish infants, prioritize the welfare of common mortals, shoulder the mission of safeguarding peace across the land, do not deceive your sovereign, maintain integrity even in the dark, and diligently practise wholesome deeds, then after your mortal life ends, your loyal spirit shall ascend to the heavens and enjoy bliss for many thousands upon thousands of years.

"You asked about the ci poem Man Jiang Hong. It was indeed composed by me, written from the emotions stirring within me at that time. As for the legend that I am the reincarnation of Zhang Fei of the Three Kingdoms era, it is merely folklore and untrue. I could never match Zhang Fei's valour.

"Let me tell you: the laws of the netherworld are utterly impartial and flawless. There are no wrongful convictions, unlike many ambiguous miscarriages of justice in the human world. Moreover, the netherworld has no anti-corruption agency such as those in the human realm. All netherworld officials abide by the laws faithfully; there are no corrupt officials or officers. Everyone is equal upon arriving here. Every mortal injustice unfolds truthfully before the karma-manifesting mirror platform. *The inexorable nether laws* bind only those who commit evil; they cannot detain people of great virtue.

Shangguan Yuhua! You must write *The Inexorable Nether Laws* carefully. Countless beings are falling into the hells nowadays. May this book be published soon. When mortals read it, they

may abandon evil and practise goodness, cultivate themselves and influence others. Then weather will be favourable, and wars will cease across the nation.

That is all for today. I have official duties to attend to. You are welcome to return if you have further questions."

I pressed my palms together and expressed gratitude to General Yue Fei.

Gratitude to the Magistrate! Gratitude to all yaksha guards!

I returned riding on a white lotus flower.

Appendix

Viewing the Stone Statue of Marquis Yue

By Liu Xianlun (Song Dynasty)

Once you beat the war drums and defended the frontier;
Your bearing swayed the nation's fortune, far and near.
Across the land, how many remember Wumu?
After a hundred years, your statue meets our gaze.
Your brush weaves lines as graceful as moon and breeze,
Your stern commands outmatch a hundred thousand troops with ease.
Heaven knows the lasting grief left unresolved,
And shall ordain the realm's revival to evolve.

Reading the Biography of Yue Wumu

By Pan Yin (Yuan Dynasty)

Vast drifting clouds veil all the distant sight;
O'er thousand hills the sinking sun sheds sombre light.
The court itself quenched hopes of state revival;
The general's frontier zeal proved futile.
The loyal subject's grievance remained unavenged to the end;
Traitors wove deep snares with cunning schemes laid.
Only a box of accounts of steadfast loyalty remains;
I gaze and weep, unable to restrain my grief.

Man Jiang Hong — Man Jiang Hong — Inscription on a Reproduction of Emperor Gaozong of Song's Handwritten Edict to Yue Wumu

By Wen Zhengming (Ming Dynasty)

I wipe the weathered stele;
The imperial words to Yue Fei remain faintly legible.
What sorrow! Once the Emperor relied on him so deeply,
Yet later dealt with him with such pitiless cruelty!

Was the hero truly meant to die once his work was done?
Alas, the harm is done; no words can atone.
Utterly undeserved, hateful, and more pitiable still:
The Fengbo Pavilion wrongful prison case!

Did he not grieve the shrinking Central Plains?
Did he not lament the humiliation of Emperors Hui and Qin?
Yet if the two captive sovereigns returned,
Where would his own throne stand!

After a thousand years, speak no more of the mistaken retreat south;
Back then, he feared the recovery of the Central Plains.
Do not overrate trivial Qin Hui's power;
He merely catered to the Emperor's desire.

Reflections on Visiting Yue Wumu's Shrine

By the Eight-Fingered Dhuta (Qing Dynasty)

After the retreat south to a precarious peace, the state was already lost;
Trees round his shrine and tomb stand dark and green today.
Without noble virtue, men leave no enduring name;
Where loyal souls dwell, the very grass breathes fragrant fame.
Wind and rain sweep lake and hills, where lingering grievances stay;
Woodcutters, herdsmen passing by, taste sorrow on their way.

If the two captured emperors had come back in their earthly span,
Who then would shed such bitter tears in the setting sun?

Three Quatrains Mourning General Yue

By Miaozheng

Poem 1
With loyal heart and nine-chi spear, he served his country;
Blood stained his battle robe on ancient warland.
A general's fame brings age-long tears of woe;
Twelve golden command tablets sent the loyal hero to his grave.

Poem 2
"Loyalty to the country" was tattooed red on his back;
He learned archery from Zhou Tong, hitting the mark.
Loyal and filial, he cast himself aside;
A man who reaches this is truly a hero.

Poem 3
He strove to restore land and bring two emperors home,
His mighty aspiration struck ten thousand men dumb.
He lifts his gaze amid the drizzling rain;
Who understands the grief within his vein?

7 / After One Cup of Meng Po's Soup, All Grudges and Kindness Are Forgotten — A Field Visit to the Platform of Oblivion

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"Amitabha!"*Ayù*pressed her palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. I asked: "Magistrate, must all beings in the netherworld drink Meng Po's soup before reincarnation?"

The Magistrate said, "Meng Po's soup exists only in the netherworld. There is no Meng Po's soup in the heaven realms, the Western World of Ultimate Bliss, nor in any other Buddhalands or pure lands. Every spirit who arrives in the netherworld must drink Meng Po's soup before rebirth. The soup wipes away their memories of past lives, allowing them to live with new kinsmen and relatives according to their karmic force. People are innately intelligent and capable of clear analysis. If they do not drink Meng Po's soup to forget the past completely, even after rebirth, despite the karmic obscuration of entering the womb, they may recall fragments of a previous life under particular circumstances and karmic conditions. Before Goddess Meng Po took up her official post in the netherworld, there was no Meng Po's soup here.

"Ancient people were inherently virtuous. The earliest ancestors of mankind who first came to the human world were celestial beings from the Abhasvara Heaven (Light-Voice Heaven) of the Form Realm. They journeyed to Earth by spiritual powers for sightseeing. In those times, the land featured clear mountains and limpid waters with pure fresh air. It differs greatly from the present, where air pollution and industrial chemical pollutants

prevail. Above all, misleading and harmful information circulating via media gravely corrupts human disposition.

“A substance called earth nourishment grew upon the land at that time, shaped like fresh, richly fragrant fruit. It bore similarities to the fruits of heavenly realms and captured the attention of the celestial beings. No humans yet inhabited Earth. The celestials observed the Five Precepts and would not commit theft, for this earth nourishment belonged to no individual — it belonged to the land itself. The celestials began to taste it. Finding it delectable, they partook abundantly.

“After feasting on the earth nourishment, the radiance of their innate spiritual nature dimmed from consuming Earth’s coarse substances. Their bodies grew heavy, and they lost the unobstructed spiritual power of flight. Hence they could no longer return to Abhasvara Heaven. Forced to settle, they took up farming, multiplied and built lives, becoming the ancestors of humankind.

“The earth nourishment belonged to the land. By consuming substances borne of the earth, the celestials forged an inseparable karmic bond with it. Their feet were bound to the ground, and flight became impossible. Though stripped of the power to fly back to the heavens, they still retained other spiritual abilities, only lacking the gift of aerial travel.

“Celestial beings ascend to the heaven realms by observing the Five Precepts and practicing the Ten Good Deeds. The celestial beings who came to dwell on Earth at that time still upheld their commitment to the precepts, trusted karmic causality, and remained kind and pure. All lived in harmony amid peace, committing no evil karma or transgressions. Yet this state did not endure. As the descendants of these celestial beings dwelt longer on Earth, their innate spiritual radiance gradually diminished further. The polluted Earth also lost its original clear mountains, pure waters and fresh air. Even so, human morality and conduct in that era were far superior to those of people today. As humanity

continued to multiply, the radiance of people's innate spiritual nature waned steadily, and their blessing rewards declined. People began abandoning the precepts and slowly grew selfish. Minor disasters and illnesses followed one after another. Hells also gradually manifested alongside the evil karma created by humans.

"In ancient times, hells were small, and few people fell into them. Even those who descended to hell received punishment for only several years. After serving their sentence, some were reborn in the human world and turned over a new leaf. As ages passed, ever more people sank into hell. Up to the present day, the number of people falling into hell has surged, filling every hell to capacity. Moreover, anyone who descends to hell nowadays is generally sentenced to a hundred years or more of torment; no one merely receives a few years' punishment as before. This arises from mankind's improper thoughts and deeds, and a grave lack of understanding regarding karmic retribution."

The Magistrate continued: "As I just said, the celestial beings from Abhasvara Heaven descended to Earth. After eating the terrestrial essence, they lost their spiritual penetrations and could no longer fly back to the heaven realm. The Buddha stated in the Shurangama Sutra: 'Just as humans who eat grains of the earth cannot lift their feet off the ground.' This shows that we must constantly watch our deeds and thoughts. A single unawakened thought can make you be turned by illusory external phenomena. Those celestial beings of Abhasvara Heaven, who possessed unconstrained spiritual penetrations, beheld the newly formed beautiful Earth (form). They flew here to wander. Drawn by the fresh, moist, fruit-like terrestrial essence that exuded manifold natural fragrances (smell), they tasted it (taste) and absorbed its substance (touch). The moment the desire to eat arose within their minds, it became a deluded thought obscuring their pure mind-nature (a mental object). This deluded thought triggered a series of outward actions.

"Though the celestial beings did not break the precept against theft, consuming the terrestrial essence forged an inextricable karmic bond with the earth, which would take time to repay. Many events would unfold throughout this period of repayment. If they failed to sustain constant right thoughts, the quality of their existence would continue to decline, and they would plant manifold painful hellish evil karmas.

"Originally, the celestial beings of Abhasvara Heaven existed as light, endowed with unhindered spiritual penetrations of flight and transformation. They possessed no heavy flesh-and-blood mortal bodies; this heavenly blessing reward was attained through their diligent cultivation and observance of pure precepts in past lifetimes. Yet merely from producing one thought to taste the terrestrial essence, the radiance of their life's spiritual nature dimmed. As their delusions and attachments multiplied, the power of their spiritual penetration gradually faded away.

"The descendants of those celestial beings, the earliest humans, could recall all past-life grievances, affections and entanglements, which disrupted their mortal lives. After drinking Meng Po's soup, they would forget all people and events of their former lifetimes. Thus they would drift along with karmic currents and gain new opportunities to temper their minds.

"Meng Po's soup embodies the five flavors of human existence: sweet, sour, bitter, spicy and salty. These five tastes also symbolize the fate awaiting beings reborn into the human world, where joy and suffering of every kind are experienced. Every cup of Meng Po's soup looks identical, yet the proportions of its ingredients differ, even though the base components remain the same. For instance, beings destined for favorable lives with abundant blessings, noble birth, wealth, esteem and sound health are given soup with a strong sweet flavor. Those with meagre blessings taste intense bitterness and sourness, while those with ordinary blessings receive a mixture of all five flavors, which also quenches thirst as they drink. Due to differing karmic forces, every being

experiences the soup differently. Goddess Meng Po was once a human being. She did not fall into hell, but was dispatched by the Heavenly Emperor to serve in the netherworld.

“In her human life, Goddess Meng Po was a Buddhist cultivator who upheld lifelong chastity and maintained pure conduct. Her secular name was Meng Po, and she was inherently kind-hearted. She devoted herself to aiding impoverished people around her. She witnessed the immense suffering of mortal beings, tormented by attachments to love, family conflicts, and especially the hardships endured by countless women. In ancient times, women were expected to remain uneducated, confined to bearing and raising children and supporting their husbands. Many women lived in helpless misery and wept alone. Meng Po saw all of this and aided suffering women karmically connected to her. This inspired her vow to help all beings cast aside their pain, forget the past, and begin anew. She persuaded countless people, exhorting them to refrain from killing, adopt vegetarian diets, recite sutras and chant the Buddha’s name.

“Meng Po once wished that there could exist a harmless soup enabling people to forget all suffering. When her mortal life ended, by the blessings and virtues accumulated from saving troubled sentient beings, she ascended to the heaven realm. The Heavenly Emperor appointed her a deity, granting her a palace in the heavens where she enjoys all manner of heavenly bliss.

“As time passed, the Heavenly Emperor observed that the mind and nature of the living beings in the human world began to degenerate. Some beings retained memories of past lives after reincarnation, disrupting human ethics and social order. Such disturbances occurred repeatedly. Since Meng Po had previously made the virtuous vow to help beings forget suffering, the Emperor resolved to fulfill her virtuous vow. He ordered the construction of the Platform of Oblivion within the netherworld and appointed Goddess Meng Po to oversee it. The Platform of Oblivion is where Meng Po’s soup is developed and prepared for

the souls awaiting rebirth, and where ghost officers and yakshas serve under her command. Ayù, taking the special passage will shorten our journey greatly. The Platform of Oblivion lies behind the Tenth Hall of the Netherworld."

I said gratefully: "Thank you for your trouble, Magistrate!"

This special passage was truly remarkable. No wails of torment from hell could be heard; it appeared to possess excellent sound insulation. A building came into view, furnished with tables and benches, yet no one was present.

The Magistrate said: "This is a council chamber. Everyone is out attending to duties, and no meetings have been held for several days. If a meeting were in session, I could not bring you via this shortcut. All this furniture is used for our assemblies. Before the task to compile *The Inexorable Nether Laws* was assigned to you, we held meetings right here. I received the official Nether Edict ordering me to receive you, Ayù, guide your tour of the netherworld, and reveal profound heavenly secrets. Upon your return to the mortal realm, you will record what you witness to exhort people of the mortal world to practice goodness and accumulate virtues."

Ah! So that was how it was. More passageways stretched ahead, and we hurried through them.

The characters "Platform of Oblivion" came into sight. The platform occupied a vast area, resembling an enormous herbal tea shop of the mortal world. Three varieties of large barrels stood here.

The Magistrate explained that the transparent barrels hold sweeter soup for those with the greatest blessing rewards; white barrels contain soup for beings of ordinary blessing rewards; black barrels hold soup for those with the poorest blessing rewards. The ghost officers distributing the soup wear matching colored garments: those serving from transparent barrels wear translucent robes, those at white barrels wear white robes, and those attending the black barrels wear black robes.

Numerous ghost officers busily poured Meng Po's soup into cups. The cups were round with a single supporting foot, seemingly identical in color, size and shape. On closer inspection, however, subtle differences emerged. Though all cups were transparent and uniform in size, the distinction lay in the raised patterns on their bases. The feet of one set of transparent cups were smooth and unadorned, feeling comfortable when souls grasped them to drink. Another set bore faint raised ornamentation that could be felt in the hand. The bases of the last kind featured triangular protrusions, which felt sharp and uncomfortable to the touch.

Many small chambers lined both the left and right sides inside the Platform of Oblivion. The rooms on the left were reserved for beings with great blessings who drank the sweet Meng Po's soup. Looking at the chambers on the left, I saw that each had a table and stools. A cup of sweet Meng Po's soup rested on the table, and two female attendants offered it to the souls. Those with abundant blessings were allowed to drink within the private rooms, much like VIP suites in the mortal world, enjoying special treatment. Each chamber on the right also held a table and seats, with a cup of five-flavoured Meng Po's soup placed upon it. Only one female attendant served the souls here, for these were beings of ordinary blessings who might also take their refreshment inside the rooms.

We walked onward and arrived at Meng Po Pavilion, where Goddess Meng Po was.

"I, Ayù, press my palms respectfully to Goddess Meng Po!"

Goddess Meng Po smiled at me. The Magistrate told me that she usually stayed at Meng Po Pavilion, where incidents frequently unfolded. Sometimes souls refused to drink Meng Po's soup. All souls who came to the pavilion carried meagre blessings and heavy karmic obstacles, so far more ghost officers were stationed here, each armed with pointed pitchforks.

I watched many souls queue up before Meng Po Pavilion. They appeared utterly exhausted and tormented by raging thirst. Some

lacked all bodily strength. Those who could still walk advanced on their own and picked up the soup when their turn came. Ghost officers supported the feeble souls to the pavilion and fed them the soup.

A shrill scream suddenly rang out. A female soul had refused to drink, and two ghost officers struck her. Alas, she suffered terribly! One officer struck her legs with a pitchfork, and she tumbled to the ground, blood flowing from her wounds. The other ghost officer immediately lifted her with his pitchfork and forced her to swallow three cups of soup. The Magistrate said this female soul would suffer chronic leg pain and throat ailments in her future mortal life. Souls who resisted Meng Po's soup not only endured beatings from the ghost officers but were also compelled to drink two extra bitter cups as punishment. Afterward, they bore lingering physical afflictions as a karmic consequence. Once they drank the soup, the souls grew dazed, and ghost officers escorted them away to be reborn.

I noticed a broad river stretching before Meng Po Pavilion. Souls who fell into its waters would return to the human world for another lifetime.

The Magistrate said: "Our time today has run out, Ayù. You may visit again another day."

I pressed my palms together and bowed reverently to the Magistrate. And then I returned by white lotus flower.

8 / The Dreadful Karmic Retribution for Wasting Food — The Hell of Abundant Grains

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"*Namo Amitabha*! I, Ayù, press my palms and pay homage to you, Magistrate. Today I wish to ask what karmic retribution awaits those who waste food."

The Magistrate said, "Wasting food leads to descent into hell to undergo karmic punishment. Whenever anyone eats even a single mouthful of food, they ought to consume it with gratitude and remorse. One should be thankful to heaven and earth that nurture all produce, to farmers for their toil, to one's parents for upbringing, and to the food blessings accumulated in one's past lives. Human survival relies on external conditions: food, air, water and sunlight. Without these supporting factors, fine provisions would not exist in the human world. First and foremost, we must give thanks to heaven and earth. Without sunlight, air and fertile soil provided by nature, where would grains and crops come from? Once natural prerequisites are in place, grains demand farmers' arduous labour: sowing, irrigation, harvesting and processing. Seeds are planted in spring and gathered in autumn, spanning spring, summer and autumn. As the ancient verse goes:

'Beneath the midday sun the farmer hoes the field;
His sweat drips down to moisten the soil beneath the grain.
Who knows the food laid out upon the plate?
Each kernel comes from bitter toil and pain!'

"Regardless of scorching sun and pouring rain, farmers painstakingly and carefully grow our food little by little. What

arduous toil this is! Therefore, we must be grateful for farmers' hard work and never waste a single grain of food.

"Every human being comes into this world through the union of the father's sperm and the mother's blood. When we were young, all of us relied on them to clothe and feed us. Therefore, we ought to be grateful to our parents for raising us. Furthermore, we must cherish the blessing rewards we have gradually accumulated through practising giving, observing precepts and doing good deeds in our past lifetimes. Those with insufficient blessing rewards will be reborn in harsh, remote regions, such as Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, remote sparsely populated underdeveloped areas within China, and other impoverished nations. In such places, food is severely scarce. Countless adults and children starve to death or suffer from malnutrition with gaunt faces. Many wait for assistance, yet some pass away before relief arrives.

"How much one eats and wears in one's life, one's height, build, social station, misfortunes encountered, wealth possessed, and the exact time of one's death—all are predetermined upon being born into the human realm. Hence, every mouthful of food we consume draws upon the blessing rewards destined for us in this lifetime. With each meal we enjoy, our stock of predestined blessing rewards diminishes by one portion. Ordinary mortals cannot break free from the fixed karma in their destiny. Only two kinds of people can alter this fate: those of supreme goodness and those of extreme evil.

"There are two categories of those of supreme goodness. The first are those greatly kind and compassionate Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who are sagely beings coming to this world by their original vows to save and deliver living beings. These Buddhas and Bodhisattvas come and go freely, unbound by fixed karma. Sometimes, to guide more destined living beings, such sages intentionally manifest various sufferings to teach through personal example. Yet these afflictions can never shackle their

minds; only ordinary beings get deluded by worldly realms of the five desires and afflictions. The second category of those of supreme goodness are ordinary mortals endowed with a mind of great kindness and compassion, who are continuously accumulating immense blessing rewards and hidden virtues. Such people of supreme goodness can also break the chains of fate and ascend directly. On the contrary, those of extreme evil will sink straight down into the hell realm burdened by heavy negative karma. For this reason, we ought to consume food with a sense of remorse and humility. Food merely nourishes our physical body, a tool enabling us to cultivate Dao and elevate our life level. Do not attach excessive importance to food. If we do, we will become enslaved by delicacies and be driven by food. Nor should we waste food or squander grains, for such conduct creates negative karma that leads to retribution in the hells.

"In the netherworld, there used to be a small Hunger Hell. Those who fell into this hell to endure punishment were wealthy landowners, rich merchants, or the wives of affluent people from the mortal world. Blessed with good blessing rewards, they casually wasted grains and food. After death, they fell into the Hunger Hell to suffer punishment. Also condemned here were wealthy people who refused to give alms to beggars and the poor; upon death, they too fell into the Hunger Hell. This hell made condemned souls endure extreme hunger to let them understand the value of grains, and purge their greed and stinginess. In the past, sentences here were relatively short, starting at three years and lasting at most fifty years. Moreover, not many souls were sent here, mostly elderly wealthy people.

"Currently, to the south of the netherworld lies the Region of Spiritual Hells. Within this area stands a great hell named "Hell of Abundant Harvest of the Five Grains". The majority of souls here are young people. These sinners wasted all kinds of food during their lifetime, and the accumulated leftovers they discarded could pile up like endless mountains. In ancient times, those who wasted

food were sentenced by the Nether Laws to suffer hunger after death. Nowadays, those who squander food will fall into the Hell of Abundant Harvest of the Five Grains once their lives end. Every scrap of food wasted in the human world is recorded by the attendant deities. After death, these wasters arrive at the Hell of Abundant Harvest of the Five Grains and are forced to consume all the food they discarded in life, piece by piece. Many young people in the human world keep buying large quantities of food and throw away whatever they cannot finish. Yet the Nether Laws impose this punishment upon condemned souls to teach them: do not purchase food if you cannot finish it and will waste it. Once you obtain food, you are already drawing upon your destined blessing rewards, so you must finish it. Follow me, Ayù. I will take you to visit this place now."

We could already smell sour stenches, rotting food, vomit, and hear retching and coughing. Then we beheld the large characters "Hell of Abundant Harvest of the Five Grains". This hell was immense! True to its name, food stretched endlessly as far as the eye could see, piled like mountains and valleys, a terrifying sight. There were countless meals, biscuits and other provisions in bags and packages, an endless variety too numerous to recount. Barrels of water and beverages were also everywhere.

The Magistrate explained that each condemned soul had a personal zone filled with all the food they had wasted while alive; no mistakes were made. Many young souls were there. The Magistrate said that besides wasting food, they had also committed offenses such as sexual misconduct.

We went over to speak to a young female soul. The mound of food in her zone was terrifying, and it would take untold ages for her to finish it all. She had somewhat delicate features, yet she struggled violently, retching constantly.

"*Amitabha*! How do you feel? Could you tell me why you have come to this place?"

"It is unbearable agony! Every single second is excruciating suffering. I can barely stop vomiting! Who are you? Please, rescue me from here!"

"Will you tell me the reason you were condemned to this hell?"

"I will! I will! When I was alive, I loved buying all kinds of delicacies. Yet I did not eat much, fearing weight gain would ruin my figure and appearance. Still, I bought my favourite food every day. I would never eat leftover food, only fresh items. Whenever new food products appeared, I had to purchase them. Whatever I could not finish, I threw away. All this waste accumulated, and now I must consume every bit of it as punishment. It was truly miserable! There was also all this water — I left taps running constantly while brushing my teeth and washing." The female soul burst into bitter weeping. Anyone could see that no one could muster any appetite facing this sour, rotten, mouldy food crawling with maggots.

We looked at that elderly female soul beside us. Her zone of food was many times larger and far more terrifying than that of the young woman we saw earlier. Not only was her area vast, but the food there emitted an overpowering sour and putrid stench. It was all rotten, heavily mouldy, discolored and crawling with worms and fungi. How could anyone eat such things? The sight sent shudders through one's heart.

"*Amitabha*! Could you tell me how you came to this place?"

"I was a housewife in my lifetime. I disliked housework. To save time grocery shopping, I often bought large quantities of ingredients and stored them at home. Food could not be kept for long, and it spoiled after some time. I frequently prepared more food than I could finish and poured the leftovers away; many ingredients were discarded after going bad. My husband often told me not to waste water and to avoid leaving the tap wide open while washing dishes. Whenever he reminded me, I would shout viciously and quarrel fiercely until he fell silent. He urged me not to squander food, yet I refused to listen. I even intentionally

bought extra groceries, letting them rot before throwing them out. After my passing, Yama condemned me to the Hell of Abundant Harvest of the Five Grains to consume all the food I had discarded. I deeply regret ignoring my husband's words." At that moment, hell guards came to drag her away to continue eating.

I turned to ask the magistrate, "Must one eat the food if it spoils unintentionally?"

The magistrate replied, "If food spoils accidentally or without your knowledge, you are not required to eat it. Eating spoiled food and falling ill would only bring unnecessary trouble. You should repent for this unintended fault and be more careful in the future to avoid repeating it. Do not let the Black Impermanence record your misdeeds and incur punishment under the laws of the netherworld. You may recite Buddhist mantras or the Buddha's name over spoiled food, then leave it in woods or grass as an offering for small creatures to form good affinities, or cast it into the sea to feed aquatic beings."

"We shall stop here for today. You may return now, Ayù. You are welcome to come again if you have further questions."

"*Amitabha*! I am grateful to you, Magistrate." I pressed my palms together and bowed to the magistrate.

I returned by white lotus flower.

9 / The Buddha's Instruction: "Those Who Waste Food and Drink Will Certainly Fall into the Naraka to Suffer!"

The Buddha said: "The torment within the Naraka far surpasses the pain of being wounded by spears millions upon hundreds of millions of times over, yet even that pain cannot compare to the agony of the Naraka. A pain no bigger than a small stone in your palm equals the hurt of three hundred spear wounds; suffering as massive as a mountain is the torment endured in the Naraka. Foolish beings harbor evil thoughts, utter evil words, and commit evil deeds with their bodies. After death, they fall into the Naraka. Within the Naraka reside beast ghosts. They drag the sinners forward, hook their upper gums with iron hooks, and then hook their jaws to force their mouths wide open. Molten copper is poured into their mouths, scorching and destroying their lips, tongues, intestines and stomachs. The molten metal passes through their bodies, inflicting unbearable searing agony. Such is the torment of Naraka. When ghosts seize sinners in Naraka, they use iron hooks to pry open their upper and lower jaws, then drive red-hot iron pestles into their throats, scorching their lips, tongues, intestines, and stomachs. The pain is unbearable, yet they do not die because their evil karma has not yet been exhausted. Such is the suffering in the Naraka." (Sutra of the Naraka, translated by the Western Region Shramana Dharmarān of the Eastern Jin Dynasty)

Jiadong said: "If you prepare unclean food to feed others, people will surely grow angry, and gods and spirits will also detest this act. Discarding tainted food amounts to wanton waste of

grain. To squander water and drinks and dump them into ditches or latrines is indeed to create negative karma."

There was an old woman known as Grandma Qiu. She died from illness but briefly revived. She said that her soul came to a place where two boats were loaded with discarded rotten food. A ghost flogged her and shouted: "You wasted all these things throughout your lifetime. How can you be excused from eating them?"

The old woman forced herself to swallow several mouthfuls, instantly felt her abdomen distend, and woke up in fright. Right after she finished telling this story, she passed away again.

(Commentary on the Treatise of the Supreme Response)

Admonition Against Discarding Leftover Food Residues

Those who recklessly squander the gifts of heaven and earth shall inevitably incur misfortune. Those who disdain and waste grains often suffer retribution by thunder. When swine and dogs are fed food meant for humans, Mencius grieved deeply over such conduct. King Zhou of Shang indulged in extravagant excess, creating a pond of wine and a forest of hanging meat, and thereby brought ruin to his kingdom. The ancients endured eating chaff and husks, while these leftover food residues of today are far better than chaff. Great virtuous cultivators once subsisted on wild herbs and fruits, while these residues are far tastier than wild vegetation. How can people indulge in arrogance and extravagance, behaving like prodigal sons of wealthy households, deluded and muddled as infants in swaddling clothes? For initial discipline, grindstones shall be sealed as a warning. Persistent offenders shall have their cooking vessels smashed, with the ban enforced perpetually.

From Volume 3, Legacy Writings of Master Yunqi

10 / The Buddha's Teaching: Attachment to Delicious Food and Overeating Lead Easily to Falling into Evil Paths!

The Buddha stated: Cultivators face eleven causes and conditions that obstruct the cultivation of the Way and may cause them to fall into the evil paths. These conditions are listed below:

First, gathering in large assemblies.

Second, craving various delicacies and overeating.

Third, undertaking excessive activities.

Fourth, excessive noise and idle talk.

Fifth, indulging in oversleeping.

Sixth, socializing amid meditation practice.

Seventh, busying oneself with many trivial matters.

Eighth, attachment and fondness for the physical body.

Ninth, delighting in inappropriate speech contrary to the Dharma.

Tenth, greed and manifold desires.

Eleventh, refusing to abide in virtuous surroundings and dwelling among wicked beings.

Cultivators should sever these eleven causes and conditions so that they may attain the Way swiftly.

Sutra of Verses on Contemplating the Inner Body

11 / The Blessings and Long Lifespans Hard Earned by People Are Wasted Away for Nothing by Smoking!

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"Amitabha!"*Ayù*pressed her palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. I wished to ask the Magistrate: "Today I would like to ask about smoking. Cigarette advertisements can be seen in many cities. In some moderately prosperous cities, regulations are relatively better; advertisements carry warnings that cigarettes contain nicotine and that smoking harms health, or smoking is prohibited in public areas. By contrast, in some underdeveloped cities, ashtrays are placed on tables in restaurants and hotels, and smokers can be spotted everywhere. Under the laws of the netherworld, does smoking incur any transgressions and punishments?"

The Magistrate stated, "Smoking brings countless harms and no benefits at all. To name but a few consequences: it directly ruins one's health, diminishes blessings and shortens lifespan, drains wealth, makes one unpleasant to others, generates foul breath, dims one's spiritual radiance, frequently brings hidden ailments, and weakens one's vital energy. Additionally, it pollutes the environment and harms the health of surrounding people. Dharma practitioners who smoke will drive away the Dharma protectors and be unable to be born in a pure land.

"Smoking does attract punishments according to the Nether Laws. Mortals who smoke suffer depletion of their blessing rewards. This loss of blessings falls into two categories. The first is damage to the organs and functions of one's present physical body. Smoking accelerates the deterioration of vital organs

including the lungs, liver, brain, eyes, nose, bronchial tubes, and arteries throughout the body. In severe cases, it triggers long-term chronic illnesses of the internal organs. Ailments caused by smoking can gradually improve once one quits smoking. Moreover, the blessings and lifespan previously lost due to smoking may be recovered through repentance, accumulating blessings, and persuading others to give up smoking.

"The second is the fading of one's innate spiritual radiance. This loss carries far-reaching impacts. Humans ought to continuously cultivate and elevate the radiance of their innate spiritual nature. Once this radiance fades, one's existence will inevitably drift toward darkness, which brings suffering. No one wishes to endure suffering; all living beings yearn for happiness. Smokers suffer poor physical health and generally live shorter lives than non-smokers. Smoking among young men and women may cause infertility. For young women in particular, smoking leads to menstrual disorders. When menstruation arrives, they may suffer abdominal pain, soreness in the waist and back, headaches, mood swings, chills, fever and other discomforts. Many people dismiss these symptoms as normal, yet they are actually induced by smoking. If they break free from tobacco addiction, their menstrual conditions will surely improve.

"Of course, there are individual cases unrelated to smoking. Women's conditions during menstruation are also connected with their karmic forces from past lifetimes. For some women, menstruation is especially agonizing. Though they have never smoked, their menstrual periods become times of extreme suffering. They endure severe dysmenorrhea, and no matter what medical treatment or medicine they receive, there is scant improvement. They can only wait for the painful monthly cycle to pass naturally. Such suffering serves to wear away their karmic obstacles. There is another condition: certain women suffer prolonged menstrual bleeding for years, perpetually troubled and

inconvenienced by persistent haemorrhage that never heals, even with medical care.

"These two types of female ailments arise from residual karmic retribution stemming from heavy karmas of killing and sexual misconduct in past lives. Women afflicted with such conditions must resolve to repent the evil deeds committed in their past lifetimes and purify their minds to eliminate these karmic offences. Additionally, they should adopt a vegetarian diet, recite the Buddha's name, perform good deeds and accumulate virtue, alongside appropriate nourishment suited to their physical condition. After a period of earnest practice, their condition may improve. Women with such illnesses must first resolve to eradicate evil karmas created in past lives and repent daily for misdeeds committed in former lifetimes. Through the power of repentance, coupled with the immense empowering force generated by daily Buddha recitation, as well as the power of meritorious virtues accumulated through virtuous deeds, three forces converge: the power of repentance, the power of the Buddha, and the power of meritorious virtues. If a woman perseveres in practising all of the above each day, these three forces will gradually dissolve her karmic obstacles and restore her physical health.

"The length of time required for each person's symptoms to ease varies, for everyone carries different karmic imprints from past lifetimes. These physical manifestations are the outward fruition of karmic causality. Since each being has created different karmas in bygone lives, the duration of karmic retributions differs accordingly. Karmic forces always require time for sentient beings to experience physical hardships, so that evil karmas may gradually be worn away and eliminated.

"Many mortals are unable to witness the various precept violations they committed in past lifetimes. They only observe the adversities and karmic retributions unfolding in this present life, which gives rise to discontent and complaints toward life, people

and circumstances around them. This phenomenon mostly arises because people fail to thoroughly understand that karmic retribution spans three lifetimes, leading them to develop all sorts of misunderstandings and erroneous views. Misunderstandings between people in society also emerge in this way.

"When encountering adversities and frustrations in life, the first thing one ought to do is reflect inward: why others live smoothly while misfortunes befall only oneself. One should recognize that this signifies the manifestation of one's karmic obstacles. Hence, we must first repent our own karma, reform our daily conduct, and conduct all affairs in accordance with the Dharma principles. Even if one lacks sufficient capability, doing one's utmost to act properly is complete and faultless in terms of cause and effect. The karmic laws of the netherworld are forever impartial and strict.

"If a pregnant woman smokes, it weakens the innate immunity of the foetus, impedes normal brain development, and directly impairs the functions of the foetus' internal organs. Children born to smoking mothers possess weak immunity. They are prone to colds, fevers and respiratory ailments such as coughing. They also tend to have irritable tempers, poor concentration during study, and easily become distracted.

"When any living being gestates within the mother's womb, it is the formative stage of its innate constitution — the period wherein the physical body for its next lifetime takes shape. Before a soul enters the womb, the quality of blessing rewards for the coming life is already predetermined. Although this represents fixed karma set from the beginning, one's good or evil conduct and habits acquired after birth can bring transformation; one's destiny can be elevated or degraded accordingly.

"The ten months of gestation are of vital importance. If a mother smokes during pregnancy, the foetus will suffer inherent deficiencies. The severity of these deficiencies depends on how frequently the pregnant woman smokes. By contrast, if an

expectant mother nurtures wholesome thoughts and conduct as prenatal education, she lays a sound innate foundation for the child's decades of life ahead. All sentient beings who have the karmic affinity to encounter this writing possess blessings. May everyone pass this message on and share it with others.

"If an expectant mother observes pure conduct throughout the ten months of gestation, that is, refraining even from legitimate marital sexual intercourse, abstaining from smoking and alcohol, maintaining a pure vegetarian diet, reciting the Buddha's name, and keeping a peaceful mind, this brings tremendous benefits and support to the foetus's head development, the growth of all internal organs, as well as the shaping of its temperament after birth. Though vegetables in the mortal world may carry pesticide residues, they are still far preferable to the many drawbacks of meat-eating, and help avoid forming negative karmic connections with other sentient beings. I shall not elaborate further on the benefits of vegetarianism; many books concerning its benefits are available in the mortal realm for reference.

"Children conceived by vegetarian mothers are known as womb-born vegetarians. Such children generally surpass those conceived under a meat-eating diet in wisdom and enjoy better physical health. Most importantly, the radiance of their innate spiritual nature can be well preserved.

"The radiance of everyone's innate spiritual nature gradually becomes tainted after one is incarnated into the human world. If smoking by a pregnant woman causes inherent deficiencies in the foetus, the child will need far more time and favorable causes and conditions to remedy such innate insufficiency after birth.

"Smokers not only diminish their own blessings and shorten their lifespan. If a smoker consistently subjects nearby non-smokers to direct second-hand-smoke inhalation over a long period, such a smoker shall also suffer additional depletion of blessings. By directly harming other people's health, the smoker

acts in a way that harms others, brings no benefit to themselves, and diminishes their blessings.

“Every time a smoker lights a cigarette, the concomitant deity of black karma — one of the white-and-black attendant deities who record one’s good and evil karmas from birth — will immediately register every single cigarette smoked by the smoker. Once the cigarettes consumed by this smoker accumulate to one pack, it is recorded by the black concomitant deity as a depletion of the smoker’s blessing rewards. Such depletion of blessings manifests as all kinds of obstacles encountered in daily life. By the same logic, if the smoker consumes two packs or more, these obstacles will intensify. If others are present nearby while the smoker lights up, the depletion of blessings intensifies, bringing troubles such as strained interpersonal relationships and suddenly being scolded. Long-term smokers not only deplete their blessings but also shorten their lifespan.

“If a smoker is destined to receive a pay rise this year, this blessing will be eliminated. Or if he runs a business and everything is set favorably for him to earn a sum of money, troubles will emerge at the critical moment and prevent the transaction from being completed. Owing to smoking, the radiance of those long-term smokers’ spiritual nature fades gradually. When their life comes to an end, they cannot pass into the good paths and will instead sink into lower realms, for all the radiance of their bodies has been shrouded by tobacco smoke.”

I said: “Magistrate! I wish to ask a question. My grandfather smoked for many years, yet he lived to the age of ninety-two. This has become an obstacle preventing me from persuading my father to quit smoking!”

The Magistrate replied: “Ayù, your grandfather was a virtuous man in his past life and accumulated blessing rewards for a long lifespan, prosperous descendants and a full household of grandchildren. He was destined to live to 102 years in this lifetime.

Regrettably, ten years of his lifespan were cut short owing to smoking.

"Originally, your grandfather was destined for a long life. The age of ninety-two at which he passed away was already his shortened lifespan. At the end of his life, severe deterioration of his lung function, persistent coughing and starvation led to his death. It was not merely smoking that shortened his life; starvation was another contributing factor. When your grandfather turned ninety, your grandmother had already departed, leaving no one to attend to his daily needs. Your paternal uncle's wife insisted on taking care of him, yet her sole motive was to seize all his property. She mistreated him, often withholding food and hurling abusive words at him. Ignorant of karma, your paternal uncle's wife thought she had succeeded. By contrast, your grandfather endured all this silently to preserve family harmony and told nobody until he died alone. Starvation was another actual cause of his death. Through this ordeal, he not only dissolved some of his own karmic obstacles but also accumulated additional blessings. That explains why, shortly after you began cultivating the Buddhadharma, he attained transcendence to the heaven realm simply by reciting the Buddha's name a few times. He endured all suffering without complaint at the time of his death, through which some of his evil karmas were eliminated, granting him this favorable blessing reward. On the contrary, your paternal uncle's wife planted grave evil karma. Due to such grave unfilial conduct, six years later, her only beloved and well-behaved son will leave her. Her karmic retribution will not end there. Later, her daughter will seize all her assets and treat her with equal lack of filial piety, and your paternal uncle's wife will succumb to illness amid suffering.

"As the saying goes: 'The retribution of good and evil inevitably manifests in the end. The karmic law of cause and effect is impartial and spares no one!'

"Here, I urge all mortal people never to act against their conscience. Every deed performed by humans is recorded and filed in the netherworld. Those who persist in unrighteous acts will inevitably incur heavenly chastisement; those who sincerely practise goodness will surely receive blessings bestowed by heaven. Bear my words firmly in mind."

I said: "What the Magistrate has told me truly takes me completely by surprise! A wave of sorrow rises within me. Grandfather indeed passed away due to severe deterioration of lung function and persistent coughing. As for Grandfather's property, I have heard my father and mother say that it was all taken away by my paternal uncle's wife, and they have harbored some grievances over the matter. Speaking of Grandfather starving to death… It suddenly dawns on me! No wonder every time I visited him, he would devour the food I brought for him without delay. Standing beside us, my paternal uncle's wife would remark that among all family members, I was the best at buying provisions, that Grandfather loved the food I brought most, and that it was only natural since Grandfather raised me from childhood. I felt pleased upon hearing that back then, yet looking back now, I see how lacking in wisdom I was! I also recall that my paternal uncle's wife never left my side whenever I visited Grandfather. At that time, I planned to bring more of Grandfather's favourite food on my next trip home. I worked far away and could only return to my hometown once every six months. But by the time I came back again, Grandfather was already gone… This is utterly heartbreaking!"

The Magistrate said: "Karmic forces are at work in all of this! Everything occurs in accordance with cause and effect. The karmic laws of the netherworld never render wrongful verdicts amid all the intricate, interwoven threads of causality. A corresponding cause inevitably brings forth a corresponding effect; every cause yields its respective karmic retribution. Your grandfather created the cause of smoking, so naturally he had to

receive the karmic fruit of smoking. His long-term smoking impaired your grandmother's lungs. The effect manifested thus: she suffered lung degeneration and persistent coughing. Mucus lodged in her throat blocked her airway; she could not draw her next breath, and she passed away. Your grandfather bore some karmic responsibility for this. Your grandfather practiced patience under the abuse of your uncle's wife, and such practice of patience generated meritorious virtues.

"No one ought to smoke, for smoking disrupts normal thinking. If you are a Buddhist disciple, you must quit smoking entirely. Smoking falls under the fifth precept – the precept against intoxicants. According to the primary extant sutras, when the Buddha established the Five Precepts for lay practitioners, he only explicitly instructed people not to consume alcohol. The Buddha did not directly mention a prohibition on smoking. Alcohol further numbs the nervous system, disrupts normal thought, destroys cultivation, incites sentient beings to commit evil deeds, and ultimately leads them to fall into the hell realm. Except for external medicinal use, or cases of critical, life-threatening illness where alcohol must be blended into medicine with no alternative available, one must not touch alcohol even in the tiniest amount. Do not deceive yourself into thinking there is no wrongdoing if you drink without becoming intoxicated.

"Therefore, the true purpose of observing the Fifth Precept against drinking alcohol is this: all consumables that numb and impair people's normal power of thinking ought to be abstained from. The prohibition is not limited merely to alcohol. As science and technology in the mortal world keep evolving, new products akin to alcohol or tobacco will emerge in the future. Any consumable possessing intoxicating properties that disrupt sound thinking must be avoided. I hope everyone will earnestly uphold this principle. If you transgress the laws of the netherworld, your blessings and lifespan will be diminished, and you yourself will ultimately endure the resultant suffering.

“Very well! Ayù, our discussion concerning smoking shall conclude for today. You may return now. You are welcome to visit again.”

I pressed my palms together and said: “Ayù is grateful to the Magistrate. I have benefited immensely from learning these karmic events unknown to my family today!”

I returned home on a white lotus flower.

12 / The Promotion of Great Emperor Dongyue and the Calamities in Jambudvīpa

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"Amitabha!"*Ayù*pressed her palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. "Magistrate! Today I wish to ask you to take me to visit the legendary Great Emperor Dongyue."

The Magistrate said: "Great Emperor Dongyue is presently one of the Yama Kings under the leadership of the Nether Sovereign Yama King. Prior to the Song Dynasty (960-1279), Great Emperor Dongyue was also known as Great Emperor Fengdu, the supreme ruler of the netherworld, holding a position equivalent to that of today's Nether Sovereign Yama King. At present, however, Great Emperor Dongyue serves as one of the Twelve Yama Kings subordinate to the Nether Sovereign Yama King. New hells have been continuously constructed, with construction accelerating after the Song Dynasty. Since the year 1995 of the human world, the construction of additional hells has accelerated further. The hells have now nearly reached saturation—for far too many people commit transgressions in the mortal realm! I know some devotees, after reading *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, wonder why new hells are built and official positions are reshuffled in the netherworld. Consider the mortal world: government institutions and their staff expand and shrink as needed. The same principle applies to both the mortal and nether realms, and even the heavenly domains follow this rule. Ayù, come with me!"

The Magistrate continued: "In the 350th year after the Song dynasty, countless unresolved grievances, both major and minor, began piling up in the human world. When the wronged souls

from these unresolved cases arrived in the netherworld, all of them brought their appeals before Great Emperor Dongyue. His judgment hall became thronged with aggrieved souls, leaving the Emperor overwhelmed with work. Later, a large, expansive mansion for the Nether Sovereign Yama King was constructed in the netherworld. Upon its completion, Great Emperor Fengdu was renamed the Nether Sovereign Yama King. The newly built mansion combined the Nether Sovereign Yama King's living quarters and administrative offices within one compound, making it easier for him to govern the nether realm. The supreme judgment hall of the netherworld that you toured last time, Ayù, was also built during this period. Great Emperor Fengdu moved to this mansion to reside and conduct official duties.

The current Great Emperor Dongyue was promoted from King Qin Guang of the First Hall. When he lived in the mortal world, King Qin Guang was a righteous and humane monarch. After the end of his mortal life, he was appointed to serve as the Yama King of the First Hall. The work duties of Great Emperor Dongyue are largely similar to those of the Nether Sovereign Yama King. Nevertheless, after some souls descend to the netherworld, they insist on bringing their lawsuits to the highest Yama King. Nearly all such souls are guided to the judgment hall within the mansion of the Nether Sovereign Yama King, to be judged personally by the Sovereign. This is merely a habit carried over from the human world. When the souls of the deceased arrive at the netherworld, every Yama King there is upright and strict. All Yama Kings handle every single case in strict accordance with the nether laws and the law of karma. Not the slightest favouritism is extended to kin, relatives or friends. Each condemned soul is sent to the corresponding hell according to the crimes they have committed. If there are valid grievances, the netherworld will issue corresponding lawful netherworld warrants to claim lives."

After crossing this rounded arch bridge, we saw the official mansion straight ahead — the Mansion of Great Emperor

Dongyue. The aura of an official residence permeated the place. Yakshas continuously patrolled back and forth upon the bridge; all of them bowed when they saw the Magistrate. With the Magistrate leading the way, we did not need to hunt for signposts, making our journey simple and swift. Travelling within the hells was in fact extremely fast, unlike the mortal world where people trudged slowly with every step pressed against the ground. Sometimes when the Magistrate strode forward rapidly, I also had to quicken my pace. We travelled by the power of our mind, our feet never touching the ground. The hells were truly boundlessly vast. This path was one I had never traversed before, yet I had no wish to memorize the roads of hell. May all sentient beings suffering in hell hear the true Dharma, cultivate the true Dharma, and attain transcendence soon to escape the torments of hell. Now we beheld the Mansion of Great Emperor Dongyue. At the entrance stood Yakshas holding great broadswords, upright before the large double red doors. The Yakshas smiled and bowed to the Magistrate, then pushed open the doors and let us enter on our own.

Upon entering, another ghost official greeted the Magistrate with a smile. He led us through a corridor beside a small garden until we reached the Judgment Hall. It seemed the Magistrate was well acquainted with all the Yakshas serving in the Emperor's mansion. This Judgment Hall was noticeably smaller than the supreme Judgment Hall of the Nether Sovereign Yama King. The atmosphere here carried a stronger ancient flavour; the building featured huge ancient red iron gates. All the furniture and interior decor were antique in style. The paintings hanging on the walls depicted figures of ancient people. Ancient weapons lined the lower sections of the walls on both sides. Facing the main entrance, above the centre hung a horizontal inscribed board bearing four characters: Great Emperor Dongyue. A Yama King was seated there; I thought he must be Great Emperor Dongyue. Great Emperor Dongyue wore the robes of a Yama King. His

complexion was ashen grey, and he wore an imperial crown. Black radiance emanated from his eyes. Ah! Once more I beheld a Yama King whose countenance was exceedingly stern, bordering on ferocity. The four characters “Great Emperor Dongyue” were also inscribed upon the Yama King’s desk.

“This humble commoner, Shangguan Yuhua, prostrates to Emperor Dongyue!”

Great Emperor Dongyue said: “Shangguan Yuhua, rise. You are welcome here. Speak forth whatever questions you may have without reserve.”

Ayù replied: “Yes, Great Emperor and Yama King. This humble commoner wishes to ask several questions. First: I have heard that the hells have reached saturation. If immoral sexual conduct continues to run rampant among mortals and the hells become completely full, meaning there are no new hells available for those guilty of sexual transgressions, does this signify that upon the end of their mortal lives, they can temporarily evade hellish punishment and await incarceration until space frees up in the hells? Or will beings currently suffering in hell be released ahead of schedule to make room for newly arrived condemned souls to receive their retribution? Second: For those who have committed many offences of immoral sexual conduct, whose blessings and lifespan are reduced in accordance with the laws of the netherworld, is there any way for such beings to completely avoid falling into hell upon the end of their mortal lives due to these transgressions? Third: What method can permanently put an end to the act of immoral sexual conduct?”

Great Emperor Dongyue said: “Alas! A powerful aura of immoral sexual conduct from the mortal world rises straight up to the Heavenly Emperor’s great hall. Immoral sexual acts have severely disrupted the balance of the righteous vital energy of nature. If humankind continues to upset this balance of natural righteous vital energy, all manner of natural disasters will occur. For instance, weather grows unstable with sudden drastic shifts

— sunshine one moment, rain the next. Temperatures may swing wildly within a single day; one can experience weather akin to all four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter in merely twenty-four hours. Tsunamis, floods, fires, earthquakes and widespread pandemics on earth serve as warnings.

Ayù! Reflect upon why all these tragic events take place on Earth in Jambudvīpa. They undoubtedly stem from collective karmic causes created by humankind. Therefore, I hope that *The Inexorable Nether Laws* can swiftly awaken deluded people in the mortal world, help save people's minds and improve social morality, and encourage all beings to abide by their duties and uphold the moral duties of the five human relationships. I hope it will reverse the disasters that the aura of sexual misconduct brings to the human world, ease overcrowding in the hells, and spare the human world frequent large-scale disasters in the near future. If the current rampant spread of immoral sexual conduct among humankind persists, overwhelming large-scale disasters will follow one after another before long. All beings guilty of immoral sexual conduct or other crimes cannot escape the ruthless, inescapable karmic net of the nether laws. They will all be gathered by this unyielding net amid major disasters and fall into hell to endure boundless torment.

Though the hells of this nether realm are saturated, the authorities of the netherworld will seek space in other regions to construct new hells. Even if these hells are destroyed, if the sinful karmas of the living beings therein remain unexpiated, we will transfer these living beings to other hells to continue receiving punishment. Only when all their sinful karmas are fully erased may they leave hell. There exist only two circumstances through which the living beings in hell may depart. First, when their karmic punishment in hell reaches its end, that is, once their evil karmic retribution from hell is exhausted, they may then undergo successive rebirths into forms that correspond to their residual karmic effects from hell.

The netherworld also contains a Dharma Hall where Earth Store Bodhisattva compassionately delivers teachings. If any soul-entity dwelling within the great hells generates even a single sincere thought of repentance, Yakshas can escort the soul-entity to listen to the Bodhisattva's merciful discourses. Empowered by the blessings of the Buddha, their good roots will awaken, allowing them to ascend to favourable realms. Most terrifying of all is that those living beings in hell do not resolve to repent their past wrongdoings. They remain deluded, sink into degradation and suffering, and even continuously deepen their manifold karmic transgressions.

When living beings bring forth a single sincere thought of genuine repentance, it is sufficient to dissolve the boundless karmic transgressions they have created. The unrelenting laws of the netherworld never bind any living being who truly repents from the bottom of their heart. Most beings released from hell are reborn into the animal realm as lowly, small creatures with limited cognition. Even if they are reborn as humans, they tend to become people with meager blessings, incomplete five faculties or other impairments.

The second path out of hell is to receive powerful deliverance performed by their relatives dwelling in the mortal world. For living beings trapped in hell, gaining such deliverance from mortal kin is relatively difficult, for this liberation relies on external causes and conditions. Many records in the netherworld document cases where mortal relatives successfully delivered condemned souls to favourable realms; some souls even ascended to the heaven realm or the Western Pure Land. Yet such outcomes do not occur by chance. Before falling into hell, these condemned souls had accumulated corresponding blessing rewards. Their deliverance could never happen spontaneously and must be rooted in good causes and conditions and favourable connections they established in former lives. Therefore, while still possessing complete faculties and sound physical health, all living beings

must diligently perform good deeds, abide by laws and fulfill public duties, observe the precepts, accumulate meritorious virtues, and amass blessings for themselves. Never misuse a healthy body to violate precepts and commit transgressions that lead to falling into hell. Once one falls into the hells, they will endure immeasurable suffering with no foreseeable end to their torment.

Those beings who have committed sexual misconduct or created hellish evil karma must understand that every cause yields an effect. Having created hellish evil karma, they will inevitably endure the corresponding karmic retribution in the hells in the future. If one wishes to avoid such retribution, all auxiliary conditions that bring forth this karmic fruit must be eliminated before the retribution manifests. If you want to completely escape falling into the hells due to sexual misconduct in this lifetime, there is only one way: thoroughly eradicate all acts of sexual misconduct. First and foremost, you must strictly govern and restrain your minds and ideas. Do not allow the slightest arising of lustful thoughts and ideas within your mind. Not even a single idea is permitted! The instant any subtle lustful idea emerges, one must repent immediately, and resolve wholeheartedly never to give rise to such thoughts of sexual misconduct again. Furthermore, continually persuade people in the human realm to refrain from sexual misconduct. This resolve is of immense importance.

For beings who chance upon this writing and sincerely seek to cut off sexual misconduct yet fail time and again: you may swear before heaven on the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month that you will refrain from sexual misconduct lifetime after lifetime henceforth. Circulate this virtuous book *The Inexorable Nether Laws* to others and sponsor its printing. In daily life, rigorously ban all words and deeds connected with sexual misconduct. Adopt a vegetarian diet, and avoid foods that stir up desire such as scallions and garlic, for cooked scallions and garlic

stimulate sexual desire. Certain medicinal herbs also stimulate desire, such as morinda root. Minimize the use of such substances.

Animals possess stronger sexual desires than humans; hence one ought not to consume food derived from animals. Apart from inciting licentious behavior, meat consumption also incurs karmic debts for taking lives. Alcohol likewise causes people to indulge in improper conduct and should therefore be avoided. Do not let your eyes view or your ears listen to pornographic publications and materials that disturb and agitate the mind and nature. In addition, persistently cultivate the Buddhadharma diligently, vow to propagate and uphold the true Dharma, and sincerely repent past transgressions of sexual misconduct. It is crucial to genuinely resolve to eradicate all sexual misconduct entirely. If you truly attain the state where "when the mind ceases, offences vanish, and both become empty", you need not fear the karmic retribution of hellish suffering.

Reciting the holy name of Namo Guanshiyin Bodhisattva can also gradually help living beings abandon sexual misconduct. If you recite the Bodhisattva's holy name devoutly each day, you will surely receive the Bodhisattva's invisible compassionate empowerment, reducing the karmic offences of sexual misconduct that would condemn you to hell. Living beings who uphold their oath strictly after making the vow will be spared the retribution of falling into hell upon the end of their mortal lives and can be reborn in favorable realms. As for the exact extent to which hellish punishment is reduced, the final verdict shall depend on the strength of the living being's resolve and power of repentance."

"Shangguan Yuhua! Do you have any further questions?"

"I have none for the moment. I am deeply grateful for your explanations, Great Emperor. This humble commoner bows and takes her leave!"

Ayù paid homage to Great Emperor Dongyue, the Magistrate and all the officials!

I returned riding a white lotus flower!

13 / Spirit of Blessings and Virtues: Tudigong (Earth God)

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha! I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"*Amitabha*!" I paid homage to the Magistrate. "Today I wish to ask the Magistrate about the Tudigong worshipped in the Earth God shrines. Are they heavenly deities or earthly deities? In other words, are they dispatched from the heaven realm, or merely ghosts attaching themselves to shrines? What are their official duties and jurisdictions? What is the difference between the household Tudigong and the doorway Tudigong?"

The Magistrate said: "The Tudigong enshrined in Earth God shrines are deities endowed with blessings and virtues, belonging to the class of upright deities of blessings and virtues. They are appointed by heaven and can receive incense offerings from mortal beings. These deities vary in the measure of their blessings and virtues. Those endowed with greater blessings and virtues preside over larger territories. For example, some village Earth Gods administer an entire village, while distinct Earth Gods govern separate districts within cities.

Mortal folk erect modest Earth God shrines for these regional Earth Gods whose duty is to govern the blessings, virtues, and safety of all sentient beings residing within their territory. Whenever a mortal is born or passes away, the netherworld sends official notification to the Earth God. Likewise, whenever beings move out of the Earth God's domain, the Earth God receives official records issued by the netherworld.

The Earth God maintains peace and order for sentient beings dwelling in his territory. If evil souls or ghosts attempt to enter his territory, the Earth God shall properly intervene and protect mortal people. All such official Earth Gods were compassionate,

righteous individuals who loved helping others during their mortal lives. Upon the end of their lifespan, they are appointed as Earth Gods to receive incense and offerings in the human world. These are the Earth Gods of abundant blessings and virtues, worthy of public homage and offerings.

These spirits whom people refer to as Earth Gods enshrined in homes and at doorways are actually upright ghosts with a lesser measure of blessings and virtues. Though mortals set up spirit tablets to venerate them and address them as household and doorway Earth Gods, they are in truth ghosts that have long dwelt within the dwellings, with longer lifespans than humans'. If no mortals reside in the house, these ghosts receive no offerings. When mortals make offerings to them, the ghosts repay the kindness and naturally protect the household, granting safe comings and goings.

Nowadays residential properties are frequently bought and sold, yet these ghosts do not follow the residents. Only the house's human owner changes. These ghosts are not Earth Gods dispatched by Heaven. Those sent from heaven include regional Earth Gods, Earth Gods for shopping malls, and Earth Gods for high-rise buildings. Many people now dwell in high-rise complexes. Each building entrance hosts an Earth God assigned by the netherworld, who answers to the regional Earth God. Earth Gods assigned by the netherworld are also stationed at the entrances of shops and malls. Such places draw large crowds, and require Earth Gods endowed with substantial blessings and virtues to receive incense offerings. Very well, Ayù, we shall stop here for today. You may go back now."

"*Amitabha*!" I paid homage to the Magistrate, and returned riding a white lotus flower.

Before heading home, I went to greet the nearby regional Earth God. I greeted him, "*Amitabha*, Grandfather Tudigong! How do you do!"

Grandfather Earth God said: “Ayù! It is very late. Hurry home and stay safe!”

I said: “Thank you, Grandfather Earth God. Do you not get bored sitting here every day?”

Grandfather Earth God said: “I am much busier now than before!”

I said: “I did not see you sitting here when I passed by some time ago.”

Grandfather Earth God said: “When I speak of times past, I mean one hundred and fifty years ago, before you were born. I was not this busy back then. People today have complicated emotional lives and many troubles. Cases of illness, death and birth have increased substantially compared with the old days.”

I said: “Grandfather Earth God! People seek doctors when sick, bodies are cremated after death, and babies are delivered in hospitals. Such things should not trouble you. How come you are so busy?”

Grandfather Earth God said: “You do not understand, Ayù. I am tasked with guarding the safety of mortal beings as they come and go. I learn of mishaps that will befall sentient beings in advance. Some events involve gains or losses of blessings, so I must handle matters before they happen. Resolving these incidents requires time and arrangement of relevant parties. Every human emits light from their body, and everyone has their own karmic foes, beloved ones and creditors. Look at the people walking on the street; observe that each one is different.”

“Very well!” I saw that many karmic foes, beloved ones and creditors trailed beside every sentient being, standing in rows. Some of them were filled with great rage. Some kept striking mortals on the head, causing those afflicted to suffer persistent headaches. Many attached themselves to mortal people. Some clenched their fists, ready to strike and pinch the living.

At that moment, I saw a man shrouded in faint white light; he upheld righteous energy. When he walked into a dark, unlit alley,

all ghosts stepped aside to let him pass. After he left, the ghosts returned to the alley. Clearly, differences do exist among people.

Grandfather Earth God said: “Recently, there is an unmarried man around here who has committed sexual misconduct and deception. He deceived a woman emotionally and financially, and persuaded her to undergo abortions several times. This woman is not without faults either; she has harbored murderous intentions and plans to perish together with this man. However, this man still has remaining karmic blessings and is not destined to die yet. In his past life, he was a cultivator who failed to uphold the precepts purely and committed sexual misconduct. Now in this lifetime, he has repeated the same wrongdoing. I am employing certain means to guide and warn him. These past few days, he has already noticed that things are not going smoothly for him. For instance, when he tried to withdraw cash from an ATM a few days ago, the money would not come out. Though he managed to get the money eventually, the process was fraught with trouble. Even when he followed every procedure correctly, inexplicable obstacles kept arising. This intervention can help him gradually reflect on his actions.

He is merely one sentient being. Every day, there are many different kinds of sentient beings and many matters to attend to, so naturally I am very busy. As you saw just now, some ghosts made way for a man. In truth, I also assist such beings. When they are about to fall, I will lend them a hand, doing what I can to keep them from tumbling. Yet mortal people in the human realm cannot sense my presence. They only feel that they narrowly avoided a fall and count themselves fortunate. That narrow escape actually comes from their own blessings.”

I said: “Thank you for all your hard work, Grandfather Earth God! I, Ayù, only now learn that you quietly watch over and aid us from behind the scenes. I am truly grateful! Farewell, Grandfather Earth God!”

I pressed my palms together.

14 / A Lie Can Be Weighty or Trivial — A Visit to the Cold Ice, Tongue-Pulling and Body-Shattering Hell

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha, I departed riding a white lotus flower.

“Amitabha!I, Ayù, press my palms and pay homage to you, Magistrate. Today my question is: what karmic retribution in hell awaits living humans who commit false speech? When I was little, my grandma told me that those who tell lies would fall into hell and be beaten by ghosts and so forth. Today I beg the Magistrate to take me to see it for myself.”

The Magistrate: “False speech is a long-drawn subject. Today I shall give you a general explanation. False speech exerts far-reaching influence. A single false utterance may cost one life, or even the lives of countless beings. False speech accompanies greed, anger and ignorance. Living humans who engage in false speech will draw forth karmic retribution in the hell realm.

“When people judge false speech, what matters most is the mental motivation of the person who speaks falsely. At the very moment the falsehood is uttered, one must observe which of the three poisons — greed, hatred and ignorance — dominates their thought. Some are driven purely by one of the three poisons: for instance, only greed with no other defiling elements; some only anger; some only ignorance. Others are motivated by two, or even all three poisons together.

“Broadly speaking, false speech falls into two categories: genuine false speech and expedient false speech. Genuine false speech draws forth hellish karmic retribution of varying degrees. Naturally, the gravity of such retribution is determined by the harm the false speech inflicts upon others. As for expedient false

speech, it does not bring hell-retribution; certain instances of it even generate meritorious virtue.

"What is expedient false speech? It refers to untrue words spoken solely to save and deliver living beings, without the slightest trace of self-seeking motive. Untrue utterances made entirely for the salvation of living beings are called expedient false speech. There is another type close to expedient false speech, one commonly employed by mortals. For example, someone asks you, 'Ayù, have you eaten?' Merely to spare the other person the trouble of preparing food and avoid feeling indebted to them, you falsely claim you have already dined. This is expedient false speech. This kind of speech still contains a self-serving inclination. Any false speech tainted with self-interest thought cannot be classified as pure expedient false speech. Those who have uttered expedient false speech may offer sincere repentance to purify their karma before the end of their life. Repentance for such utterances is indispensable, for expedient false speech serves as the precursor to genuine false speech. If one habitually speaks expedient false speech, one's innate spiritual nature will be defiled, and over time, one will form the habit of uttering genuine false speech.

"Those who need to repent for expedient false speech may report before the Buddha when, where and for what reason they spoke expedient falsehoods, and now sincerely repent for them. If one cannot recall the specific false speech one has spoken, one may genuinely resolve to reform past misdeeds and vow never to repeat them. Bear this in mind: though the nether laws show no mercy when punishing the treacherous and evil, heaven always looks with compassion upon living beings who sincerely repent. It will surely leave them a way forward, allowing them to gradually walk toward light and recover the innate radiance they possessed when first descending into the human world. After sincere repentance, such people may further beseech the empowering grace of the Buddhas to eradicate their karmic obstacles. From

then on, they should recite the Buddha's name with resolve and seek rebirth in a Buddhaland or pure land. For those without Buddha statues at home, they can confess and state their karmic transgressions facing the sky. What matters is genuine repentance; the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are everywhere. Beside every person stand the Black and White Impermanences, recording everyone's daily good and evil deeds.

"If the mind at the causal ground is untrue, the resultant fruition will be twisted and deviant. Those who speak expedient false speech will also reap the retribution of false speech. Hence, those who have uttered expedient false speech must purify themselves through repentance. Through the mental power of sincere repentance and the Buddha's power gained from reciting the Buddha's name, the unwholesome causes will be thoroughly cleansed and eliminated; otherwise, distorted karmic retribution is inevitable. One reaps retribution corresponding to the mental state with which one spoke expedient false speech. There are many hells for those guilty of false speech. Let me take you to visit a relatively new hell of false speech. Ayù, come with me!"

"Many thanks, Magistrate!" We set off following the Magistrate and swiftly arrived at a hellish realm. The Magistrate explained, "This is the northern quarter of the netherworld. All hells within this domain pertain to the hells of false speech."

Wow! Once again an enormously vast expanse. Its limits lay beyond my perception. This was an expanded addition; it was truly inconceivable.

The Magistrate said, "Ayù, you shall visit just one of these false speech hells for now. We will arrange a suitable time for you to tour the others later."

"Gratitude to you, Magistrate!" The temperature here is extremely frigid. I struggle to adapt. Even the vast temperature differences between north and south in the human world during winter have never troubled me, yet the cold in this hell is unbearable. I need to recite the Buddha's name right away to

adjust my mental power and endure this bitterly frigid hellish environment.

The Magistrate said, “The temperature here is minus one hundred and fifty degrees Celsius. This new section of the false speech hell was first constructed in the mortal year 2000. Where we stand now is the Cold Ice, Tongue-Pulling and Body-Shattering Hell, the most punitive among the false speech hells. It is a place of extreme cold and excruciating torment. In the old Ten-Halls district in the southern part of the netherworld lies an older false speech hell, where condemned souls endure lesser degrees of suffering. Alas, morality has decayed in the human world, and human minds have grown corrupt. Many condemned souls are imprisoned here. In their earthly lives, their false speech led others to abandon the pure path of self-cultivation. Deceived by their lies, those misled beings wandered astray, degenerated in conduct, indulged the five desires, and lived a life of drunken oblivion. These souls severed others’ wisdom-life while alive. Upon death, they fell into the Cold Ice, Tongue-Pulling and Body-Shattering Hell as karmic retribution. Ayù, you shall observe this hell first.”

As all know full well, hell is defined by ceaseless wails, cries of agony and horrifying shrieks. Yet here, the bitter cold seemed to slow down time and space, and everything unfolded in sluggish motion.

“The Cold Ice, Tongue-Pulling and Body-Shattering Hell” — these large bronze-colored characters came into view. The gateway to this hell looked remarkably modern. Upon seeing us approach, the yakshas at the gate bowed reverently to the Magistrate and opened the entrance for us to pass through.

This hell was immense. I saw innumerable beings enduring tormenting karmic punishments within it. To the left, a group of condemned souls suffered nearly identical retributions. Numerous computers used as instruments of torture filled this hell. Fully automated, these devices launched torture instruments

to hunt down the condemned souls, striking every target with perfect, unfailing accuracy, never missing a single soul. Mechanisms were also embedded in the hell's walls and ceilings, from which torture implements flew forth. This was a modern-style hell. Apart from dealing wrathfully with the condemned souls who attempted to evade punishment, yakshas were kept busy operating these many computers to afflict the condemned. The condemned souls here truly endured boundless sufferings. They had to face not only ferocious yakshas but also the merciless computer-based instruments of torture. This hell held vast numbers of condemned souls and computers, yet comparatively few yakshas. Let us first observe the two souls by the wall, one male and one female, undergoing identical karmic retribution.

The female condemned soul began to tremble slightly from the bitter cold. She endured terrible suffering and struggled to rise from the ground with extremely sluggish movements, finally regaining a semblance of normal form. Right then, a ferocious yaksha stabbed her in the back with a spear. Screaming in agony, she was impaled and dragged by the yaksha toward a desktop-style torture console. Instantly, two snakes burst forth from its screen: one black, one red. Fiercely they lunged at the soul's mouth. The red snake ripped open her lips, while the black snake seized her tongue, tore it off and cast it onto the ground. Then the tongue flew precisely back into her mangled, blood-stained mouth.

From the console darted countless sharp, blade-like implements, unlike anything I had seen in the mortal world, resembling nails. They hurled themselves onto the female soul's body. Pierced by these torture instruments, she collapsed in utter torment and fell unconscious. Even in her swoon, swarms of insects devoured her flesh. Her blood splattered everywhere across the ground and was eventually entirely drained away by

the vermin. Due to karmic force, she regained consciousness once more, trapped in this endless cycle of suffering.

The male condemned soul endured matching retribution. Some condemned souls received blows to both sides of their mouths from iron bars studded with nails wielded by yakshas. Only a few strikes left their lips lacerated and bleeding. After beating a soul, a yaksha dragged them to another torture console. Horrifying black-centipede-like creatures emerged here to suck the blood from the soul's mouth and slowly devoured their tongue. Flying needles then shot out to sew their mouth shut. Other souls were dragged toward consoles by yakshas with hooks piercing their mouths and heads, blood streaming non-stop.

I then beheld a female condemned soul screaming in agony, caught by such hooks. This torture console hung suspended upon the wall. It emitted dreadful, ear-splitting noises, from which tiny fiery-red sharp projectiles flew forth. Upon touching the condemned soul's mouth, a hissing sound echoed, and her mouth immediately melted away. Alas, such appalling, excruciating torment! The suffering was beyond imagining.

At this point, the Magistrate instructed one of the yakshas tasked with enforcing punishment to come and explain what transgressions landed sinful souls in the Cold Ice, Tongue-Pulling and Body-Shattering Hell.

The yaksha set aside its ferocious demeanor and spoke to me, "That female condemned soul you just saw, Ayù, out of jealousy in her mortal life, spoke false speech to slander a cultivator who strictly upheld precepts in purity. She deliberately undermined that cultivator's propagation of the true Dharma. Because of her deceptive words, many people believed her lies and lost their fundamental faith in Buddhist practice, good deeds and moral precepts. For these false-speech misdeeds, she fell into this hell upon death. The Nether Sovereign Yama King flew into great wrath and consigned her here for one kalpa of karmic retribution.

Even after completing her term within this hell, she still has to undergo further punishment in other hells.

"This male condemned soul worked in the medical-advertising trade in his mortal life. He earned large sums of ill-gotten money within a short time by releasing false advertisements. Many living people trusted his deceptive ads and suffered harm to the internal organs of their bodies. Some developed lifelong chronic impairment of visceral functions; others endured a rapid deterioration of physical faculties, and some even died. They never suspected that they had been misled by his medical advertisements. For his false speech offences, the netherworld subtracted his blessings and lifespan, and he met a traffic accident that sent him prematurely to this hell for retribution.

"All condemned souls confined here fell due to false speech committed in their human lives. In the mortal world, they spoke falsehoods to slander those who propagated the true Dharma; they uttered malicious untrue words that harmed others' lives and property; they incited others through lies to commit various precept violations; they peddled goods harmful to people's body and mind under false pretences; they deceived others out of property or chastity through deceptive speech, and committed other evil karmic deeds. Countless cases of such misdeeds filled this hell and could not be recounted one by one. Those mentioned above were merely the more common offences that drew beings here."

The Magistrate went on, "In short, any deliberate false speech spoken by people that harms others' bodies, minds or lives will bring corresponding hell retribution. If readers chance upon this text, may they sincerely reform their past wrongs. They may also persuade others to recite the Buddha's name, relying upon the empowerment of the Buddhas to eradicate the black karmic force generated by past false speech. One ought to preserve purity of body and mind at all times and teach others never to utter false speech. Every instance of false speech dims one's innate radiance.

When this innate radiance fades, misfortunes readily arise, and one may draw forth illnesses and successive calamities.

“Ayù, this shall conclude your visit for today. I must attend a meeting shortly. Come again tomorrow if the opportunity is suitable.”

“*Amitabha*! Gratitude to you, Magistrate! I shall head home at once to write down this account, and trouble you again after finishing this record.”

“*Amitabha*!” Having pressed my palms together and given thanks to the Magistrate, I departed riding a white lotus flower for home.

15 / The Painful Retribution of Frivolous Speech — The Glass-Computer Hell Where Thorny Snakes Tear off Condemned Souls' Tongues

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha, I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"Amitabha!I, Ayù, press my palms together and pay homage to you, Magistrate!" "Magistrate! Today I came across an article on a website about healthy-diet topics. Its author, a nutrition expert, held well-developed theories on diet, drew upon diverse scientific data, and possessed a deep understanding of wholesome eating. He wrote an allegory describing how to turn food into joyful, nourishing delicacies. His wording was concise, vivid and thoughtfully crafted. Teaching people to value wholesome eating was in itself a fine theme. Yet he framed the whole process as an analogy for wholesome sexual indulgence. His explicit language stirred all kinds of lustful illusory fancies and disturbed proper mindfulness. Reading this piece, I truly felt pity for the author. He had devoted so much time researching dietary theories, only to publish such writing online."

I asked the Magistrate: "If mortals utter words of this kind to arouse lustful thoughts and misdeeds in others, will they fall into hell for retribution? If such a hell exists, I would also like to visit it."

The Magistrate said, "When living people employ exaggerated, frivolous words that stir evil thoughts and deeds in others, or utter speech that defiles the spiritual nature; or use honey-tongued, deceitful words masking malice beneath smiles; or indulge in

pleasing yet hollow sophistry, mockery and other scattered, useless talk; or tell bawdy jokes in daily life that bewitch minds, stir lust and arouse craving for sensual pleasures; or compose desire-fueled songs, romantic novels, films, television shows, song-and-dance performances, music and paintings with indecent content and wording, which cause youths to grow in greed, hatred, stupidity, and incite killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and false speech, robbing people of right mindfulness — all these constitute the transgression of frivolous speech.

"Should mortals who commit frivolous speech pass away, they shall fall into the Glass-Computer Hell for punishment. This hell is one of the hells within the false speech domain. Frivolous speech goes hand-in-hand with greed, hatred, ignorance and arrogance. It defiles one's spiritual nature imperceptibly. For the sake of time, let us go and visit it now."

We swiftly crossed the central part of the hell. We caught faint sight of two great serpents belonging to the false-speech hell-zone. Ah! They were the two huge serpents of the False Speech Hell. Then we slowly descended toward the ground. As we came down, a highly modern hell of reflective glass came clearly into view. This hell looked distinctly avant-garde. Yet its grim atmosphere was rent by shrill glass-screeching noises mixed with tormented wails; the racket was deafening.

The gateway of this hell was splendidly adorned. The varied color scheme of its inscriptions gave no hint of horror. Were it not for the piercing cries of suffering and the nether chill permeating the place, one would hardly know one stood at the gate of a hell. We followed the yaksha inside to observe the torments within.

There were many small transparent glass chambers in this hell, and each condemned soul endured torment within its own glass room. The pace of suffering differed among the condemned souls. Most of the computers on the left were of the red variant, so the torments for the condemned souls unfolded more swiftly. All the

computers on the right were black, and their torments proceeded at a slower rate.

Let us first look at the condemned souls on the left. Inside her transparent glass chamber, a female condemned soul had just regained her normal, healthy human shape and rose to her feet. She was drawn toward the faint green glow radiating from the fiery-red crystal computer, together with ringing, chirping sounds: “Ding-ding-jiu-jiu-ling-ling”. As she drew close to the computer, a small red thorny snake with a pointed mouth instantly darted out of the crystal computer’s screen and sank its fangs into the condemned soul’s tongue. The condemned soul shrieked in fright! Once her tongue was caught, the little red snake coiled its thorny body around the soul’s tongue until the tongue was torn free and dropped onto the ground, leaving the soul’s mouth filled with blood. At that moment, the crystal computer suddenly shattered completely with the sharp crash of breaking glass. All its shattered fragments struck the condemned soul. She tried to dodge in panic, yet the glass chamber was far too cramped; there was nowhere for her to escape. Helpless and in agony, the condemned soul endured this punishment on endless repeat. As for the black computers on the right that I beheld, they cast a dusky-grey light. Black centipedes darted out from them. The rest of the torment was identical, save that everything unfolded at a somewhat slower pace.

The Magistrate bade the yaksha bring the female condemned soul over for my interview. Weeping, the female condemned soul recounted how in her earthly life she habitually told specious bawdy jokes before her colleagues and friends, deliberately seeking others’ admiration for her fine figure.

She said, “Mirrors lined every wall inside my home. I beheld my own body from every angle. I also had the habit of walking about my house completely naked. Sometimes I invited close female friends to gather at my home so they might admire my naked form. In daily life, I loved to exaggerate and embellish all

manner of events. Matters that were not truly terrifying became wildly sensational and frightening once they passed my lips. When I saw others grow alarmed, I told them I was only joking with them, chiding them for being overly timid and no fun at all.

I delighted in using my wits to tease and amuse those around me. When my earthly life ended, Ox-Head and Horse-Face dragged me down to hell. The Yama King flew into great wrath. He declared that my bawdy jokes and conduct at work shook the resolve of young people fresh out of school, leading some of them to commit grave sexual misconduct. He ruled that I had committed frivolous speech in my lifetime, and sentenced me to five hundred years of punishment within this Frivolous Speech Hell — Glass-Computer Hell. Wu wu wu! I only sought to make everyone merry back then. I never imagined the karmic consequences were so severe that I would have to fall into hell to suffer retribution. Since you write books, please tell all living beings never to utter bawdy jokes, never to speak exaggerated and embellished words, and above all never to tease or toy with others. Wu wu wu! I dare not ever do such things again. I beg the Magistrate to save me and set me free; I wish to depart from this place."

The Magistrate said: "One reaps hellish retribution corresponding to the evil deeds one commits in mortal life. Reflect well upon all your thoughts and deeds. For the sake of time, we conclude our visit for today."

I asked the Magistrate, "Why do the computers on the right side of this hell make the condemned souls suffer at a slower pace?"

The Magistrate explained, "Among those who commit frivolous speech, some words harm sentient beings swiftly, while others gradually shake their innate mind-nature of goodness. All things abide by the law of cause and effect. Therefore we must pay close attention to our words and deeds in daily life. Especially when we are alone, we ought all the more to observe the precepts guarding our mind and nature, and must never transgress the nether laws.

A great assembly is to be held in the nether realm today. Ayù, you are welcome to return another day."

"*Amitabha*!" Having pressed my palms together and given thanks to the Magistrate, I departed riding a white lotus flower for home.

16 / Flying-Nail Tongue-Cutting — A Preliminary Glimpse of the Torments within the Double Tongue Hell

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha, I departed riding a white lotus flower.

“Amitabha!I, Ayù, press my palms and pay homage to you, Magistrate. I wish to ask you about the following question: If mortal beings commit double tongue, do they fall into hell to receive retribution?”

The Magistrate said, “When mortals commit double tongue in grave measure, they do fall into hell for retribution. Double tongue, which roughly corresponds to divisive speech in the narrow sense, means that a person tells conflicting versions of the same incident to two or more people, with malicious intent to alienate others, damage interpersonal relationships, and incite quarrels and fierce conflicts between them.

The karmic laws of cause and effect in the nether realm lay primary weight upon one’s thinking — that is, the mental process prior to any outward action. This thinking drives all one’s words and bodily acts. When one devises in mind how to maliciously utter double tongue, one already plants the shallow karmic causes and conditions for torment in hell. Double tongue keeps company with greed, anger, ignorance and false speech.

There are grave and mild degrees for committing double tongue. Those who commit grave double tongue inflict harm and damage upon all manner of physical and mental benefits of mortals; they surely fall into hell to receive retribution. As for those who commit mild double tongue: some act solely for the interests of both opposing parties and seek no personal gain for themselves. Out of a wish to help others, they deliver different

versions of events suited to each party's temperament. Their starting point is to bring harmony among beings, yet they play the role of one who engages in double tongue. Such persons fall under the category of mild double tongue offenders. Those who commit mild double tongue may purify themselves through sincere repentance during their earthly life and need not descend into hell for punishment. The content of this repentance matches the explanation given earlier concerning repentance for expedient false speech. The only difference is that one substitutes double tongue in place of expedient false speech; every other part of the repentance remains identical.

Many people commit double tongue in the present age. Even young children pick up divisive speech (double tongue) and false speech from their elders. This constitutes one major factor behind the decay of public morals. Language serves as a vital tool of communication for communal living. Verbal instructions are less powerful than personal example. Parents must set a good example by matching their deeds to their words. In this way, children will naturally gradually follow suit and cultivate goodness within themselves.

At the beginning of man, human nature is good. Good example-setting must begin with each one of us. If all people abide by laws and refrain from violating the karmic law of cause and effect set by the nether realm, mankind shall surely be saved and disasters shall be postponed. Heaven cherishes all living beings; it always leaves a glimmer of hope for beings who sincerely repent, permitting them to reform gradually. The great peril lies in people failing to give rise to the mind of repentance.

"Ayù, I now take you to visit the hells where those who commit double tongue in their earthly lives endure punishment." For the sake of time, we travelled swiftly to the northernmost section of the False-Speech Hell-Zone and landed before a signpost indicating that the Left-Right-Rushing-Hell lay to the left, and the Black-Needle Tongue-Piercing and Mouth-Sealing Hell lay to the

right. Which of the two should we visit? With the mind-eye empowered by the Buddha's blessings, I observed how these two hells differed. It turned out the hell on the left was larger and held more suffering sentient beings; yet the hell on the right was more wretched. Let us head for the left one.

As it happened, the Magistrate also wished me to witness the Left-Right-Rushing Hell. We arrived there speedily. The Magistrate informed the yaksha at the gate of my mission. The gate swung open. Alas! It was another vast hell. Let us observe what lay before us. Within my field of vision, condemned souls were divided into two groups, left and right. Many souls on the left ran frantically left and right in helpless agony, blood streaming from their mouths. No matter how they fled, they could not escape the tongue-hunting pursuit of the computers.

Within this hell, fierce yakshas wielded iron hammers, long swords and spears to keep order among the condemned souls, preventing them from straying outside the range of the torment-dealing computers. Every soul was precisely tracked by implements shot forth from these computers, each computer automatically assigned to punish souls within its fixed zone. Whenever any condemned soul entered a computer's range, the unit shot forth five nail-shaped blades. First, the nails drew the tongue outward, and then they severed the condemned soul's tongue.

Take a look at this newly-arrived suffering female soul. Terror colored her countenance, and her legs lacked strength to walk. A ferocious yaksha prodded her into the torment zone with his spear. Her back throbbed in agony and bled. The computer immediately emitted two beeps, called out the condemned soul's name, then instantly fired nail-shaped blades aimed at the female soul's mouth. Bearing the pain in her back, she cried out and fled left and right.

I felt that the computer addressed the condemned soul: "Is your name XXX?" As the female soul was about to reply and opened her

mouth, the nails flew into her mouth to draw her tongue outward. In agony, she tried to pull the nails out with her hands. Strangely, the nails turned soft and did not injure her hands, so she let go and fled left and right. Yet with every step she took, her tongue got stretched by the five nails. The stretched portion was sliced off by the nails' tail-blades and fell to the ground. Tormented by such agony, she struggled desperately to get out of the computer's range. At last she lifted her head and fled toward the left.

Alas! The ferocious yakshas on both sides never let her escape. On the left stood hammer-wielding yakshas who vented their wrath upon condemned souls. One enraged hammer-yaksha swung his hammer and struck the female soul upon her head, knocking her unconscious. The yaksha would not permit her to remain unconscious. He rudely hooked her mouth with an iron nail and then slapped her across the face. Blood flowed again from the soul, and she regained consciousness in a dazed state. She scrambled to her feet and fled toward the right. Yakshas also stood on the right; these were the dusky-green icy yakshas. They instantly released frigid gas and battering chunks of ice. The female soul's legs failed her, and terror drove her backward toward the computer to undergo this torment all over again. The sight made my own head spin. The condemned souls endured suffering with nowhere to flee.

I looked toward the yaksha and asked, "Hammer-Yaksha, can you show some mercy? This female soul's old wounds have not yet healed, yet you have struck her again. She has already suffered terribly and is given not even a moment's respite."

The Hammer-Yaksha said, "This condemned soul was greatly given to double-tongue in her earthly life. Whatever news came to her knowledge, she embellished and exaggerated it into incidents that harmed both parties. Her interpersonal relations were terrible; wherever she went she stirred up enmity and displeased others. Worst of all, she harmed her mother-in-law.

Before marrying her, her husband Mister A showed great filial piety toward his mother. His mother became a widow when Mister A was three years old and raised him alone. Mother and son relied upon one another and lived in peace. After this condemned soul married into the household, she grew jealous of her mother-in-law. She repeatedly committed double tongue, maliciously ruining the bond between mother and son. She even deliberately slandered her mother-in-law, falsely accusing her of an illicit relationship with a man. Overburdened with work, Mister A believed the slanderous whispers spoken by his wife. The bond between mother and son broke apart, and the grief-stricken mother passed away in sorrow.

The mother-in-law's soul arrived in the nether realm and brought charges against this female condemned soul for double-tongue defamation. For the double tongue she committed among mortals, she must now suffer punishment here within the Left-Right-Rushing Hell, the hell for those guilty of double tongue, and receive our blows. This is only her first station of karmic retribution. Once her term here ends, she will proceed to other hells for further torments."

At this moment, a ferocious dusky-green yaksha cast a glance in our direction.

The Magistrate said, "Hammer-Yaksha, attend to your duties. The Soul-Summoning Demon-King has urgent matters awaiting attention."

Bowing to the Magistrate, the Hammer-Yaksha said, "Magistrate, please continue your inspection. I take my leave."

The Magistrate said, "Ayù, we must hasten to deal with several earthly-world calamitous incidents today, so all of us are heavily occupied. You are welcome to return and continue your observation another day."

"*Amitabha*!" I pressed my palms together in greeting to the Magistrate. "Thank you for your labors. Please attend to your affairs. I give thanks!"

I departed riding the white-lotus blossom for home!

17 / Retribution for Harsh Speech — The Extremely Agonizing Venomous-Snake Gut-Piercing Hell

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha, I departed riding a white lotus flower.

“Amitabha!I, Ayù, join my palms in greeting to you, Magistrate.”

“Magistrate, I would like to ask: If mortals utter extremely harsh words that injure others’ self-esteem and hurl insults in anger; if parents beat and discipline their children, if spouses quarrel, refuse to yield to one another, and spew vicious curses, will these deeds condemn them to the hells to undergo karmic retribution?”

The Magistrate said, “Mortals commit harsh speech when they habitually utter cruel words out of anger and show no mercy toward others, hurting and insulting them. Examples include calling others beasts, telling them to die, cursing them to have no descendants and die with no proper burial. They even curse people regarding matters that the victims hold most dear. For instance, Person A greatly longs for a son, yet his wife can no longer bear children and has had only five daughters. One who commits harsh speech maliciously hurls vicious words such as ‘you have no descendants, your fine house stands empty for ghosts to dwell in’ directed at Person A. This leaves Person A in low spirits at best; at worst it damages family harmony and may even drive him to seek illicit affairs to father a son. When households lack harmony, social unrest results. Many mortals currently commit harsh speech, reducing others to utter shame and despair, with some even taking their own lives. All coarse and cruel words that

injure mortals' mind, body and spirit count as harsh speech, especially extremely vicious utterances.

Those who commit harsh speech must descend into hell to undergo punishments. Harsh speech is a vicious cycle of bad habits. Harsh speech keeps company with greed, anger and ignorance. All who commit harsh speech share anger as their common trait, yet the malice and karmic force of each offender vary in depth. If one utters a single harsh-speech offence against a sage who has certified fruition through cultivation, it is enough to cause one to fall into hell and endure boundless manifold sufferings. Even when one finishes one's hell retribution, one transmigrates into the animal realm and undergoes all manner of animal sufferings and torments. Upon rebirth in the human realm, one receives the karmic retribution of lowly social status, until the residual retribution brought forth by one's harsh speech is entirely exhausted. During this lengthy ripening period of karmic fruits from harsh speech, the extreme suffering endured easily gives rise to fresh karmic forces, thus drawing endless torment upon the person. Only when one meets the guidance of a good knowing advisor, arouses great resolve to amend one's wrongful conduct, practices goodness and accumulates virtues, does one gain good causes and conditions to be liberated from the sea of suffering. Otherwise, one drifts boundlessly in the sea of suffering and sinks for myriad eons!

Among the condemned souls who fall into hell to undergo punishments, many suffer retribution for harsh speech committed in their earthly-life interactions with spouses, friends, colleagues, parents, brothers and sisters. Harsh-speech offences occur most frequently between husbands and wives, for such offences are also easiest to commit. Women account for a larger proportion among those who commit harsh speech. As an official of this realm, I exhort all women to guard their verbal karma well. Many women carry heavy black karma. Drawn by past black karma, they encounter all sorts of physical and mental hardships

in life. Some inevitably utter harsh speech and harm those around them whenever they endure monthly physical discomfort.

Human beings are conditioned to view things from a self-serving perspective. At the slightest setback, they readily give rise to complaints against people, objects and surrounding circumstances. They always regard others as being at fault rather than themselves. Thus they allow bad moods to surge and fade in an instant, and commit harsh speech that wounds others.

To prevent harsh speech, one must first maintain a calm and stable state of mind. To sustain such calmness and stability, one needs to reflect upon oneself, constantly examining whether one acts wrongly or uses improper words. In the present-day human world, social mores are unsettled, and genuine peace of mind is hard to preserve. Temptations and outer obstacles abound. Yet no matter how difficult circumstances become, we must break through these obstacles and refrain from harsh speech. If we fail to overcome them and commit harsh-speech offences, we will fall into hell after the end of our lifespan. In the end, we ourselves, not others, endure the resulting suffering.

The compassionate Buddha, during his earthly sojourn, foresaw the manifold obstacles that living beings would encounter when seeking liberation from the sea of suffering in the Dharma-Ending Age. Living beings would find it difficult to arouse right mindfulness for cultivation and practice. For this reason, the Buddha specially transmitted the cultivation of Buddha-recitation, so that living beings may attain liberation with ease. We need only recite the Buddha's name simply and persistently each day, and adopt a vegetarian diet. Relying upon the empowerment of the Buddha for gradual inner transformation, we slowly purify the body and mind, maintain calmness of thought each day, and instantly turn our everyday negative, deluded thoughts into good thoughts of reciting the Buddha's name. Through these good thoughts of Buddha-recitation, good habits take shape. These good habits then replace our various unwholesome past habits. In this

way our destiny slowly transforms, our future gradually moves toward brightness, and we shall regain the radiance of our innate spiritual nature.

Those who commit harsh speech see their bodily aura turn red at the very least. Those guilty of severe harsh-speech offences have their aura shift from red to dark-red. Those who remain unrepentant and keep committing harsh speech have their aura slowly turn from dark-red to black. Black signifies extremely grave harsh-speech karma, which draws all sorts of adverse events. Sentient beings with a red bodily aura already suffer poor interpersonal relations, low spirits and quick-flaring tempers, while sentient beings with dark-red bodily radiance most readily attract living beings from the ghost realm to draw near. Those living beings of the ghost realm carry strong anger and readily fly into rage. As soon as worldly people fly into a rage, anger-inclined ghosts hasten forth in response. Added to these are the karmic foes, beloved ones and creditors from the ghost world — every person has some of these, only differing in number. They fan the flames beside the angry mortal. As soon as anger arises, these wrath-inclined ghosts urge the person to grow angrier still, to speak even more excessive and cutting words. The mortal then flies into unbridled fury against their will, and the karmic force of harsh speech spirals out of control."

"Thank you, Magistrate! Your words are most enlightening. They finally explain why, before I took up Buddhist practice, I lived in disharmony with my family. I would inexplicably endure scolding and manipulation. Time and again my family members suddenly turned vicious, filling me with great fear. That fear faded only gradually after I began my Buddhist cultivation."

The Magistrate said, "Indeed, Ayù. Part of your experience stems from such influences. Another factor is that this family member has taken rebirth from the demon realm. In this lifetime, this being holds one single aim: to obstruct your spiritual cultivation and stop you from upholding the true-Dharma work.

You must repay resentment with kindness, cultivate diligently, and observe pure precepts to gradually transform this person. When this person's conduct grows overly fierce, you may withdraw appropriately. Paradoxically, this person's violent behavior has forged in you a strength of character uncommon among ordinary people. Moreover, you ought to give thanks for the hardships they impose, which temper your resolve in cultivation. They test whether you can uphold the unshakable Bodhicitta for liberation from birth and death amid adversity."

"I understand. Thank you for your instructive words, Magistrate! I shall hold fast to the solutions you teach: Repay resentment with kindness, practice diligently, observe pure precepts, and gradually transform my family members. I shall surely put these teachings into practice."

"Press onward, Ayù. Now I shall take you to view the Harsh Speech Hell. Near the Ice-Cold Tongue-Pulling Body-Shattering Hell lie several False Speech Hells. Temperatures there rise somewhat; they are not so bitterly cold, yet suffering remains excruciating. Today we visit the second section of the False Speech Hell zone, where it is not cold."

We arrived swiftly. As we were about to land, the Magistrate pointed and said, "That place lies ahead." I looked downward. We saw two terrifying large-headed serpents lying coiled. Their heads were enormous and frightening. Fortunately they did not move. I had never seen serpents with such huge heads. One was an enormous dark-red large-headed serpent and the other an enormous black large-headed serpent, their jaws stretched wide open. The jaws of that terrifying dark-red large-headed serpent formed the very gate of this hell. Beside the gate stood many other fearsome serpents of somewhat smaller size. They were not truly small; they only seemed diminutive next to those two colossal ones. These serpents were red, black and green. This hell was constructed in the likeness of serpents.

Upon the gate were inscribed the words “Venomous-Snake Gut-Piercing Hell”. Ah! After the venom took effect, piercing torment followed. A yaksha saluted the Magistrate, then opened the gate and led us inside. Even before we entered, dreadful sounds reached our ears: hisses, screams and cracking noises as though something was being bitten through, intermingled with the long, mournful sound of the wind. Dreadful noises abounded here, all blending together into a harsh din that grated painfully upon the ears. As we stepped inside the gaping jaws of the huge serpent, one yaksha instructed me not to venture too far inward and told me to observe from the side, warning of numerous mechanical devices within. This hell was also equipped with many computers. Ferocious yakshas busily operated these numerous computers to inflict punishments upon the condemned souls. It was clear that there were not enough workers on duty. The yakshas moved quickly and skillfully at their consoles. Without the aid of the computers, the yakshas would surely have been far more overburdened. Just as the Magistrate had earlier stated, female condemned souls made up the greater number within this Harsh-Speech Hell. Upon arriving here, I felt immense pressure in my head and mind. My head ached, and an indescribable inner distress welled up within me. Still, I pressed on with the observation. When I beheld the suffering condemned souls, my own headache felt trivial by comparison.

Many condemned souls here were bitten upon their mouths and tongues by dark-red venomous serpents flying out from the computers. Every computer emitted dreadful, utterly grating noises. When bitten on the mouth and tongue by the serpents, the condemned souls’ whole bodies turned black and purple from poison, and they collapsed to the ground in agony. Some screamed aloud, while others fell unconscious without a sound. Then the serpents blasted terrifying sounds into the souls’ ears to rouse them. Once the souls regained consciousness, sharp blazing-hot hooks instantly flew up from the ground and fastened onto both

their ears. With a hissing sound, their ears melted away at once. At the same time, the serpents dragged the souls' tongues and intestines out and cast them upon the ground. Next, smoking boiling water gushed forth from some computers to scald the tongues and intestines until they shrunk to a tiny size. From other computers, hard ice chunks flew out, smashing the tongues and intestines to mangled pieces amid sprays of blood.

After the tongues and intestines were scalded by boiling water or shattered by hard ice blocks, small double-pointed iron nails flew out from the computers, piercing densely into the souls' tongues and intestines. The serpents then seized the tongues and intestines in their jaws and shoved them all back into the souls' mouths. Tormented by excruciating pain, the souls cried out, rolled and moaned upon the ground. This cycle of punishments repeated without any rest for the condemned souls.

The punishments within this Harsh-Speech Hell unfolded at extreme speed, dazzling the eyes. Written accounts could only convey so much. Still, I strove to relate as much as possible for all to know. Countless other punishments unfolded on-site, yet time did not permit every detail to be described.

At that moment, one female condemned soul suddenly threw herself down and kowtowed hard in my direction. The yaksha showed her no mercy and kicked her roughly back beside the computers. Alas! Hell held truly merciless sufferings. This female condemned soul was pitiable indeed. Then the Magistrate instructed the yaksha to bring the female condemned soul over so I might interview her for my writings. The yaksha lifted her and carried her toward me.

The female condemned soul knelt before me and cried, "Xiao Yuzi, save me! Xiao Yuzi, save me! Xiao Yuzi, save me! You must be Xiao Yuzi!"

Xiao Yuzi was my childhood pet-name. Everyone used to call me that when I stayed at my grandmother's home. I had been away from that city for more than twenty years. Who could this

woman be? Surely she must have been a neighbor from my childhood days.

I stood stunned and said, “Forgive me. We must have met before. Were you a friend of my grandmother’s? It has been far too long since an elder called me by that name. How did you come to this place?”

When my grandmother passed away, that childhood nickname seemed to vanish along with her. I never expected to hear someone address me so again here in hell. Memories of bygone days welled up, as though time flowed backward. In an instant, sorrow surged over my heart.

The female condemned soul spoke, “Xiao Yuzi! It is only natural that you do not remember me. I had very little contact with your grandmother. Our homes were not far apart, and my house stood on the path which everyone had to pass. When you were small, you always hopped and skipped along the road. I could recognize your footsteps whenever you went by. Many times as you passed my house, I would be doing chores in the living-room and catch sight of your profile. Back then, my two daughters would often ask: ‘Why can Xiao Yuzi play every day, while we must keep doing endless housework?’ And I would lash out at them with harsh-speech insults: ‘It is your own wretched fate and lowly lot! You were born into a poor family and live in a tiny house; you are short-lived wretches. You achieve nothing, being girls. Had you been boys, I would let you go out and play each day. Get back to your work at once! What is there for you to envy? Xiao Yuzi merely has a family with stinking money and a big house to live in. What good is a large house if no one dwells inside? Even if she plays all day, what is so great about her? She is just another short-lived creature like you; she will not turn into a boy.’

Your grandmother was well-known in our neighborhood as an honest, helpful woman. She would lend others whatever she possessed, and people might even keep borrowed items without returning them. Yet after her daughters-in-law came into the

household one after another, your grandmother had to lend things to others behind their backs, otherwise she would be scolded by those daughters-in-law. She endured all kinds of mistreatment from her daughters-in-law. At that time I thought your grandmother suffered long-term bullying simply because she was too honest. Therefore I resolved to be far fiercer, so no one could ever bully me. Your grandmother said she became much happier after you were born. She often told others how resolute you were, with a particularly boyish disposition. I recognized you as Xiao Yuzi just now from seeing your profile. Do you still remember the incident from twenty years ago back in our hometown, where a daughter-in-law bit through her mother-in-law's fingers?"

Ayù: "Ah! Now I recall it. So it is you, Auntie! That incident was widely-known. I heard of it yet did not know who was involved. I was still young back then and understood little of adult matters. Grandmother told me there was strife between you and your mother-in-law. Apparently, your mother-in-law longed for a grandson, but you gave birth to two daughters in succession. I also heard that you two seemed to quarrel frequently. Yet Auntie, you were not very old. How is it that you have arrived in hell so soon?"

Weeping sorrowfully, the female condemned soul replied, "In my earthly life I had an extremely bad temper. I used harsh speech to curse others every day, and no one escaped my reviling. Whenever people or things went even slightly against my wishes, I would shout and hurl bitter, cutting insults at them. Even bad weather, such as rain disrupting my plans, would make me curse heaven for sending such wretched, ill-omened rain. It was simply unbearable. My mother-in-law and my daughters, in particular, bore my curses day after day. When you lived in our hometown, I had only just married into the family. My mother-in-law was still in her prime, yet I bit through her fingers. Later, as I could bear no more children, my mood and temper grew far worse. When I shouted at her, she was no match for me. Every day I called her an old woman who would not die.

Whenever she prepared to go out, I would hurl insults calling her an old whore and an old hag, accusing her of going out to seek men and saying that if she died out there, I would not collect her body. Enraged, she would shout a few retorts before leaving. In every quarrel she lost to me; I always won. At times I beat her until her head streamed with blood. Biting through her fingers was my warning to her shortly after I wed into the household.

I died of hepatitis at home. Ox-Head and Horse-Face dragged me off to hell. Upon seeing me, Yama King flew into great wrath. He said that in life I wounded others with harsh speech, beat and scolded my mother-in-law, and cursed heaven and earth. I had committed offences against filial piety, righteousness, integrity, shame, propriety and reverence. He sentenced me to undergo punishments within the Venomous-Snake Gut-Piercing Hell for four hundred years. It already feels like an immensely long time here. The suffering is beyond measure! While alive I thought that loud ferocity could overpower those around me. Now I finally know I was wrong. Wu wu wu…, the agony is unbearable!

Xiao Yuzi! How is it that you have come to hell? I beg you, rescue me from this place!"

At that moment a yaksha boomed fiercely, "Cease your idle talk! Return to your punishments at once. Ayù is busy touring hell to write books that transform mortal beings. She has no time for your ramblings. Begone!" The yaksha swung his fork to strike her.

A wave of distress rose within me. Noticing my sorrowful countenance, the Magistrate called out to the yaksha and allowed the condemned soul to speak a little longer, to hear what more she had to say.

Trembling in agony and weeping bitterly, the female condemned soul said, "Xiao Yuzi! Can you let me take part in your writing? Everyone in our hometown knows that under your grandmother's influence you grew up with a heart inclined toward helping others. I believe you will save me. You will not stand by and let me perish. Though our contact was scant, we were

once neighbors. Let me join your work to exhort people against harsh speech. I shall bear witness to how I fell into hell and suffer for my harsh-speech offences. I will help you warn all beings. I implore you, deliver me!"

"Auntie, *Amitabha*! My heart grieves deeply to see you fall into hell. I wish I could set you free, yet I possess no power to take you out. I come to tour hell and compile *The Inexorable Nether Laws* by virtue of the Buddha's empowerment. The Buddha appoints who shall take part in the writing; I have no authority to arrange this privately. I am a Buddhist disciple who observes the Five Precepts, recites the Buddha's name and keeps a pure vegetarian diet. Auntie, arouse your resolve to recite the Buddha's name and repent your karmic offences. I shall dedicate the meritorious virtues from this writing to you, so that you may soon escape suffering, attain bliss, be reborn in the Pure Land and be born from a lotus flower by transformation. I shall try to plead your case before this Magistrate and hope it may bring you some relief."

Then the female condemned soul cried out, "I beseech you, Magistrate! I kowtow before you! I deserve this! I deserve this! I performed no good deeds while alive. Now I long to do good for others just as Xiao Yuzi does. I beg you, I truly recognize my wrong-doings!"

The Magistrate said, "During your earthly life, you wounded others with harsh speech and beat and insulted your mother-in-law, committing grave filial impiety under the Nether Laws. The Nether Laws serve to punish the wicked and malicious. Once you commit the evil karmas that cause you to fall into hell, the Nether Laws of Hell will lay firm hold on you. You can only escape from hell after all your evil karmas have been completely worn away. The Nether Laws will not reduce your punishments out of personal favor merely because you know any of its officers. Even fathers and sons, closest kin, can expect no special consideration here. All who transgress the Nether Laws must undergo punishments. Even if those you harmed choose to forgive

you, even if your mother-in-law lets go of all grievances and pardons your unfilial conduct, the impartial justice of the Nether Laws will still not spare you. According to the karmic principles of the netherworld, once your mortal lifespan and blessings are exhausted, Ox-Head and Horse-Face will ruthlessly bring you to hell to undergo punishments. I perceive that remorse has stirred within you for the moment. Considering your cooperation today, I shall instruct the yakshas to record one instance of your cooperative repentance, equivalent to one session of listening to the Dharma in the netherworld. Due to your lack of filial piety in life, none of your descendants perform meritorious deeds and dedicate meritorious virtues to you in accordance with the Dharma. Your brief encounter with Ayù arises from the ripening of karmic ties as distant relatives in past lives. Cherish this favorable karmic condition of impermanence well.

The netherworld does grant opportunities for genuinely remorseful condemned souls to hear the Dharma and attain liberation. Yet the prerequisite rests entirely upon your own repentant mind. When your repentance generates a certain degree of inner radiance, yakshas will naturally lead you to listen to Earth Store Bodhisattva preach the Dharma. This sublime opportunity to hear the Dharma is available equally to all. When you sincerely repent over a period of time, yakshas will come to suspend your punishments and escort you to the Dharma assembly. Yakshas of the netherworld keep records for each session. Every time you listen to the teaching, your spiritual nature is purified, transformed and blessed by Earth Store Bodhisattva's compassionate Dharma voice. At present, the radiance of your repentant mind is insufficient. Return now and let your karma wear away."

Once more the yaksha spoke fiercely to the female condemned soul, "You are fortunate today! The Magistrate has taken the trouble to explain so much to you. Get back to your punishments!" He delivered another kick. Alas, these yakshas! Always so fierce

and rough-mannered. Every yaksha here was grim-tempered. Never fall into hell to suffer; misery meets you everywhere.

Then the Magistrate continued, “Mortals who have committed harsh speech and wish to avoid falling into hell after reading this account may repent of their harsh-speech karma while still alive. Much depends on how grave the karma is, for instance whether it cost another person their life. Even grave offences can be greatly ameliorated through repentance. Ordinary harsh-speech karma may be completely purified before the end of one’s lifespan. The method of repentance is the same as that given for false speech yesterday; simply substitute harsh speech for false speech. For example: I, so-and-so, at such-and-such time and place, committed such-and-such an act of harsh speech.

Bear this in mind: repentance must be sincere. This is of vital importance. One single sincere mind penetrates the three periods of time: past, present and future. One sincere mind can exhaust immeasurable evil karmas and reach straight to the principle of the Nether Laws of heaven and earth. Share and spread the sincere repentance method recorded in *The Inexorable Nether Laws*; doing so can dissolve one’s past evil karmas. The netherworld keeps detailed records of every mortal’s good and evil deeds. Do not neglect small good deeds. Great blessing rewards spring from small acts of goodness and scrupulous observance of the precepts. Remember: do not read this text, perform repentance, and then recklessly commit offences again, repenting over and over with full awareness of your wrongdoing. Those who knowingly transgress receive aggravated karmic retribution.

Ayù, our tour of the Harsh Speech Hell ends here for today. You are welcome to return at another time. I must attend to official duties now.”

“Ayù is bowing to the Magistrate! I am deeply grateful that you helped that auntie today.”

The Magistrate replied, “Do not stand on ceremony. In our view, all condemned souls are equal. The netherworld hopes all such souls can leave hell at the earliest opportunity. Assisting you with your writing is also my duty. Our goal is to prevent more mortals from falling into hell to undergo punishments once their lives end, which in turn eases our workload in the netherworld. I ought to give thanks to you instead. It would be ideal if you could visit more often and publish your book as soon as possible. Reveal all the sufferings of hell to the mortal world, inspiring living people to observe precepts, recite the Buddha’s name and practice good deeds. You must not betray the kindness of the Buddhas, nor the trust of the Jade Emperor and the Yama Kings, who divulge profound heavenly secrets by disclosing the truth of the netherworld and hellish punishments to save mortal beings.

Nowadays mortal beings in the human world commit evil deeds, disbelieve karmic retribution, and act recklessly. Sexual misconduct, killing, theft and false speech have almost spiralled out of control. Their misdeeds offend heaven and disrupt the righteous energy of heaven and earth. The publication of *The Inexorable Nether Laws* aims to rescue those who have done wrong yet still retain a conscience, guiding them out of the sea of suffering.

Now hurry back to compile your writings. I must attend to official affairs.”

“*Amitabha*! I am grateful to you for your help amid your busy duties, compassionate Magistrate.” I joined my palms together in thanks.

I returned home riding a white lotus flower.

18 / Never Engage in Angling — The Solitary Souls Angling Fish in the Sword-Sea Hell

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha, I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"*Namo Amitabha*!" I paid homage to the Magistrate.

Ayù: "Today I wish to ask the Magistrate: What karmic retribution awaits sentient beings who take pleasure in angling? I have seen some angling enthusiasts in the mortal world treat angling as mere recreation. Fully aware that seawater near cities is contaminated and contains hazardous heavy-metal substances, they haul fish onto the shore for amusement. Some scrape off partial scales, gouge out eyes, slice off fins and eviscerate the creatures before tossing them back into the sea. Will such deeds cause one to fall into hell? If this corresponding hell exists, I hope to tour it."

The Magistrate: "Angling counts as the act of killing living beings. Whether people angle for fun or to eat the catch, they accrue black karma of killing and shall fall into hell to undergo punishments. Here lies the distinction between the two cases. If one angles purely for amusement without wounding the fish or maiming its limbs, allowing it to swim back to the ocean and live normally, the ensuing karmic retribution is comparatively lighter. Even so, such actions terrify the fish's mind, namely, its consciousness, forming bad karmic bonds between the angler and the fish.

"If anglers fish for entertainment with no intent to kill, each time they hook a fish, one month's worth of their blessing rewards is deducted, including provisions and all manner of worldly enjoyments for that month. For instance, if an angler is supposed

to get a pay raise the following month, the black karma brought about by his angling will render the pay-raise impossible. Furthermore, the angler may also face unreasonable reprimands from superiors, suffer ostracism from colleagues, and be disliked by others. Due to the karmic rebound from harming fish, his body will naturally experience sudden, unprovoked bouts of pain. If this angler runs a business and is about to close a deal with a major client the following month that will earn him one million, this blessing reward will also be wiped away by the black karma generated from angling. Even those born with abundant past-life blessing rewards will encounter numerous obstacles and can only painstakingly earn three hundred thousand.

"If anglers maim the hooked fish out of playful amusement, they lose one month of blessing rewards and suffer various physical ailments in return. The specifics of karmic suffering follow this rule: every agony endured by the wounded fish is reflected back onto the angler through karmic force. Anglers will develop headaches, dizziness, various oral illnesses, symptoms of mental disturbance and other conditions. People born with cleft lips receive this deformity as retribution for angling in past lives. All other physical pains they endure match exactly the injuries inflicted upon the fish. If one angles for the purpose of eating the catch, each instance shortens one's lifespan by a minimum of seven days and diminishes three months' worth of blessing rewards. Those who catch large numbers of fish, or pregnant fish, face harsher punishments under the netherworld's Nether Laws, judged according to the detailed records kept by their attendant deities.

"The bodily aura of habitual anglers gradually fades from red to grey. A dim bodily aura brings constant setbacks in daily affairs, restless sleep, excessive suspicion and a quick temper.

"At the moment of birth, every person bears a round bodily aura, whose shade varies from individual to individual. One's bodily aura embodies their blessing rewards as well as good and

evil karmic forces. A full, bright aura that stretches wide and far signifies abundant virtuous karma, great blessing rewards and noble conduct. The Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas of supreme wisdom possess the most perfect auras of all.

"As mentioned before, two attendant deities follow each mortal day and night from birth until the end of their lifespan. They accompany people everywhere—even to the lavatory, during bathing and sleep. One attendant deity has a male appearance, positioned on the mortal's left with a pale white aura, tasked with recording all virtuous ideas and deeds each day. The other has a female appearance, standing on the right with a pale black aura, who keeps track of all evil thoughts and misdeeds.

"When a mortal accumulates excessive black karma, the female attendant deity will warn and admonish them in displeasure. Only a tiny number of people can pick up faint prompts, while the vast majority remain unaware. Every month, the two deities submit their detailed records of good and evil deeds to the netherworld.

"For those who commit grave evils and bring harm to the world, the netherworld will arrange sudden disasters to cut their lives short even before their destined lifespan expires, sending their souls straight into hell to undergo punishments. Apart from fixed karmic destinies, every word and action in this life creates fresh karma. One's blessing rewards and karmic balance rise and fall daily, computed by adding and subtracting the good and evil acts one commits."

Ayù: "I am truly grateful for your thorough explanation, Magistrate. I wish to ask further: Must anglers lose their blessing rewards in this way even when they merely fish for casual amusement? If someone with sparse blessing rewards goes angling frequently, would their life turn utterly miserable?"

The Magistrate: "That is correct. A single fish is a sentient life. By ending its life in a brief moment, the karmic force of this transgression and killing rebounds swiftly upon the angler to be

endured. Some people may claim: 'I follow no religion and need not observe any precepts; I enjoy full freedom. Besides, angling is nothing like murder or arson, merely a pastime in spare time.' Such thinking is erroneous. The Nether Laws and Regulations bind every sentient being without exception. Whether religious or not, all wrongdoers will inevitably face judgment under the Nether Laws. Practitioners who break precepts incur heavier penalties; deliberate transgression brings aggravated punishment. There is only one way to escape punishments in hell: observe the Five Precepts and the Ten Good Deeds. Those who uphold the Five Precepts can retain rebirth as a human; those who practice the Ten Good Deeds safeguard their blessing rewards and do not fall into lower realms. Yet people in the human world easily commit the Ten Evils through careless daily words and deeds. The most reliable method to preserve one's blessing rewards is observing precepts and reciting the Buddha's name. By persistently reciting the Buddha's name without ceasing, one will surely reach the state of exhausted karma and emptied desires, and recover the innate pre-heaven radiance.

"Every person is surrounded by souls of one's karmic enemies, beloved ones and creditors waiting for a chance to retaliate. Any act violating the Nether Laws gives these souls an opening to seek vengeance. Even true Dharma-protecting deities do not interfere with the karmic order of the netherworld, nor do they condone precept violations. These true Dharma-protecting deities enforce the Nether Laws with a compassionate mind, dispensing fair rewards and punishments to all sentient beings.

"Everyone is born carrying good and evil karmas accumulated from past lives. If one strictly upholds the Five Precepts and Ten Good Deeds, surrounding karmic foes, beloved ones and creditors can only follow them, with no opportunity to inflict harm. You may wonder why some indulge in false speech, sexual misconduct and debauchery, living lives that flout the Nether Laws while still enjoying wealth and status. This is because they possess great

good karma from former lives, and their allotted blessing rewards in this lifetime have not yet been exhausted.

"When one's good karma prevails, one attracts favorable fortunes, smooth undertakings and happiness. Those who keep breaking precepts without cultivating fresh goodness and blessings deplete their stored goodness and blessing rewards little by little, joy fading and suffering following. If an angler lacks other virtuous deeds, repeated killing builds up heavy black karma. Combined with past evil deeds, non-human karmic foes, beloved ones and creditors may possess their bodies to wreak havoc, triggering unforeseen disasters and even taking their lives.

We must pause here due to limited time. Follow me, Ayù."

Ayù: "Very well, Magistrate."

The Magistrate: "This hell was built as an addition in mortal year 1995. Most condemned souls here are people from the East."

We landed swiftly upon a vast expanse resembling a large industrial zone in the mortal realm. We had to watch the signposts closely to avoid getting lost. Numerous gates stood here; no yakshas patrolled the entrances, yet each entrance bore its hell's name, and all the heavy doors were tightly locked. This was another vast expanse of hellish realms. I felt dizzy. Mortal life shifted fleetingly, and even hell saw constant new construction. How long would it take to tour all these realms?

The Magistrate said, "Today we shall only visit Chamber Seven in Block Seven: the Solitary Souls Angling Fish in the Sword-Sea Hell. Staff are short-handed throughout the netherworld, so there are no gatekeepers here. Let us simply ring the doorbell directly."

Ayù: "Very well, Magistrate."

I searched the grounds: Block One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, then Seven. Chamber One through to Seven. There it was. Modern-style traditional Chinese characters glowed dim green: Solitary Souls Angling Fish in the Sword-Sea Hell. I stepped forward and pressed the doorbell.

A yaksha opened the gate and paid homage to the Magistrate, then we entered. This hell takes the form of a vast sea teeming with ferocious swordfish of varying sizes with sharp edges. The realm is split into two sections. Condemned souls suffer alone on the left, while groups of three to five endure torment together on the right. A notable feature here is the small staff: only four yakshas are stationed, two on each side. It is plain to see the manpower shortage; these four labor tirelessly indeed.

This hell is also quite sizable. It is unlike the seas of the mortal realm, where only one or two people could fit on a single boulder along the shore. Ordinarily, a beach in the mortal world would already be considered crowded if more than five hundred people gathered there. In the sea within this hell live iron-sword fish that feed on human beings. The largest iron-sword fish measures roughly ten metres in length. When opening their mouths, they can devour twelve sinful souls at once. Smaller iron-sword fish can consume them bite by bite.

Surprisingly, there could be numerous sinful souls on a single stone here. The tiny stone beside me had 45 sinful souls on it, while the other stones had even more. To the left, sinful souls stood or sat alone on the seaside rocks, endlessly cycling through the karmic torments of life and death. Let us observe how this male sinful spirit beside me suffered. He had just regained consciousness and was coming to his senses. The sinful soul rose and sat upon the rock. Drawn by the karmic retribution for the evil deeds of angling, he seemed to have completely forgotten the pain he had endured just moments before.

I saw images of fish swimming in the sea arise in his mind. He was certain he would catch these unusual sea fish and immediately grill and eat them aboard his boat while admiring the scenery. He gazed happily at the swordfish in the sea, with a long electric fishing rod beside him. The moment his hand touched the rod, it jerked upward automatically. Looking closely, there seemed to be a sharp, curved iron hook on the rod that caught his

head, driving straight in through his mouth. Blackness engulfed his mind. He could not scream in agony as blood poured from his mouth. His limbs thrashed wildly, yet every struggle only pulled the hook deeper into his flesh.

The fishing rod hurled the condemned soul straight into the mouth of a two-metre-long iron swordfish below the sea. As the soul fell, he landed right onto a sharp iron spike beside the swordfish's jaws. Impaled in terror, his body sprayed blood everywhere. The swordfish let out a hideous roar and tore his head clean off. It first devoured his nose and eyes, then the lower half of his head down to his throat. The soul's limbs twitched and contracted in unbearable agony. The pointed jaws sliced open his belly, and the fish consumed his insides bit by bit until his entire body was eaten whole. Afterwards, the swordfish spat all his mangled, bloodied remains back onto the original stone. A karmic wind blew through the Solitary Souls Angling Fish in the Sword-Sea Hell, restoring and reviving the broken body. Once revived, the soul was forced to endure the same torments on endless repeat. Alas, such suffering was utterly excruciating beyond words.

The Magistrate ordered a yaksha to bring the soul over for an interview with Ayù. The soul was still unconscious as the yaksha carried him over in a dazed state. I looked on perplexed, wondering how an interview could proceed while he lay unconscious. The yaksha explained that he would be given netherworld ginger broth to restore his body temperature and enable speech. After the interview ended, the karmic wind would revive him once more to resume his punishments.

The yaksha splashed cold water to rouse him. After drinking the reviving ginger broth, he regained his senses, yet appeared worn out and tormented. The yaksha told him to truthfully recount how he came to fall into this hell.

The condemned soul spoke: "In my mortal life, I ran a wholesale dried seafood business in an eastern city and earned

great wealth. Yet I had very few genuine close friends; I was always a lonely person. I had countless fair-weather drinking companions from trade, all superficial acquaintances who used one another. I had to force smiles every day, and life felt hollow. I long wanted to quit the seafood wholesale trade, but kept running it solely for profit as business thrived. I was passionately fond of angling from childhood. The main reason I fell into this hell was that I thought I had amassed ample wealth from a young age, so I decided to launch a business centred around my hobby, believing losses would not ruin me. I searched around the world for professional angling gear, along with high-quality hiking and expedition equipment, and opened a shop specializing in fishing tackle alongside outdoor supplies.

"I started the shop prepared to accept failure, yet business boomed, boosting my confidence. I became friends with some like-minded angling enthusiasts and resolved to promote angling skills to expand my revenue.

"Following the promotions, my company prospered rapidly. Proud of my successful investments, I aggressively marketed my services to firms and private groups, organizing fishing cruises, birthday gatherings and custom packages. I also helped fellow enthusiasts open angling restaurants and tackle shops. Later, I wanted to concentrate on planning how to further expand my fishing enterprise.

"As my family wealth kept expanding, I moved my household into an upscale neighborhood for the affluent. The three of us relocated into a spacious mansion spanning several thousand square feet, attended by several domestic servants. Yet good fortune did not last long. Less than three months after moving in, my son grew timid and oversensitive. He lived in constant fear, claiming someone intended to attack him, though no one in the household harbored such intent. My wife suffered from lower back pain and depression, flying into rages daily and suspecting

me of having an extramarital affair. Servants came and went in constant turnover.

"My wife and son consulted mental-health doctors, taking oral medication and receiving injections, yet their conditions worsened rather than improving. Afterwards, my son would hide in terror at any sudden noise around the house. Once bright and lively, he grew terrified of strong light and sought out dim corners. All the curtains had to be drawn shut to block direct sunlight streaming into the home. Strained marital relations meant constant scoldings at home, leaving me dejected. To escape my troubles, I began drinking and singing karaoke with friends every day. I started an extramarital affair with a young woman I met there, which resulted in two pregnancies. I persuaded her to undergo an abortion both times.

"I sank into a life of indulgence and debauchery, often staying away from home entirely, though I still thought of my son deep down. One day I blacked out from drunkenness and fever and was rushed to hospital by ambulance. Tests confirmed I had advanced liver cancer. After three months of agonizing suffering, I passed away in terrible pain, wuu… wuu… wuu… (sobbing bitterly). Before I could grasp what had happened, Ox-Head and Horse-Face dragged me dazedly to hell in iron chains."

The Nether Sovereign Yama King slammed the table in towering rage and shouted: "Do you acknowledge your crimes? You were reborn in the mortal world endowed with abundant blessing rewards, yet you failed to make good use of them to further practice goodness and cultivate blessings. Instead, you squandered your blessing rewards recklessly by running businesses that involved killing living creatures. Worse still, you induced others to follow suit, corrupting people's minds and severing their kind and compassionate hearts.

"Your gravest karmic offence in this lifetime is angling and taking animal lives. You shall first be imprisoned within the Solitary Souls Angling Fish in the Sword-Sea Hell to undergo

punishments for ten thousand years. You can only come before me for judgment on your other transgressions once every angling shop founded owing to your influence has shut down permanently."

Terrified, the condemned soul dropped to his knees and cried out in desperation: "I only ran my tackle shop for eight years. Why am I sentenced to ten thousand years of torment in hell? Why must I wait for unrelated angling businesses to close? I hold no shares in those shops at all."

The Yama King continued furiously: "For every angling shop opened because of your promotions and publicity, you bear fifty percent of the corresponding karmic burden under the Nether Laws, with the shop owner bearing the other half. If an owner expands to open a second branch, your share falls to thirty percent, while the owner takes seventy percent. Those shops promoting killing would never have existed without your persuasive influence. The netherworld never arbitrarily assigns evil karma; we only attribute these debts to you because your advertising directly led to their establishment."

"Senior officials of the netherworld all build their standing upon observing the precepts. Those who uphold the precepts radiate bodily auras. The purer one's virtuous observance, the higher their rank ought to be. You were destined to live a life of immense wealth, robust health and a flourishing family. In one of your past lives, you were a man of great goodness who amassed tremendous blessing rewards through generous giving. The retribution of that virtuous karma was meant to ripen in this lifetime. You would have prospered in any trade you chose, gained extensive connections, and owned twice the fortune you accumulated. Sadly, you took up angling from an early age. After finishing your studies, you went into wholesale dried seafood trading. Every penny you earned from that trade came as eroded portions of your accumulated blessing rewards.

"Your wholesale seafood business swiftly depleted half your blessing rewards for this lifetime. The netherworld repeatedly sent warning dreams: visions of sea creatures devouring and chasing you across the ocean. These dreams urged you to stop your ways, switch to an honest livelihood, and cease squandering your blessings to build up killing karma. Yet you never reflected on your deeds or felt remorse. Instead, you fed your arrogance, greed and craving. Not only did you neglect to practice goodness and accumulate virtue, but you also expanded your angling tackle shops and indirectly fuelled the growth of angling restaurants in the mortal realm. Under the Nether Laws, you must repay this heavy karmic debt through prolonged suffering in hell.

"Had you taken up legitimate trades on earth and avoided grave transgressions, you could still be living a happy life even without specially practicing goodness, cultivating Dao or accumulating blessings. You would never have fallen into hell to endure boundless agony."

The Nether Sovereign Yama King called: "Solitary Soul Yaksha!"

The Solitary Soul Yaksha answered: "Here!"

The Yama King ordered: "Take him away immediately to the Solitary Souls Angling Fish in the Sword-Sea Hell to undergo punishments and settle his karmic debts!"

The condemned soul wept bitterly: "Wuu… wuu… wuu… I deeply regret my insatiable greed. I craved ever greater wealth but chose the wrong path. Young lady, please record every word I have told you. I hope my friends will read this, mend their ways, and abandon angling and tackle shop businesses."

"I beg you! If you publish my story, my acquaintances will recognize me from my family affairs and past thoughts. They will know this account is true and reform themselves. If they reform soon and stop the killing involved in angling, that can also shorten my torment in hell. Wuu… wuu… wuu… No one wishes to face endless hellish suffering. Ten thousand years is an unimaginably

long stretch of time wuu… wuu… wuu… I yearn desperately to escape this place."

Ayù: "I know the city you speak of; it is plagued with severe killing karma. So you have such a share of heavy black karma on your back. Writing *The Inexorable Nether Laws* is my duty, and I shall write down your testimony in full. You ought to recite the Buddha's name; compassionate Buddha power will shelter you. I shall dedicate the meritorious virtues gained from writing this book to you, wishing you freedom from suffering and peace at the earliest possible time."

The soul sobbed: "Wuu… wuu… wuu… I can force myself to recite Buddha despite the pain, by bearing it as I do now during our conversation. But once the punishments resume, unbearable agony overwhelms me nonstop. Dizzy and delirious, I cannot utter the Buddha's name at all. Wuu… wuu… wuu… May all people in the world shun angling forever and avoid falling into hell. Do not repeat my mistakes, trapped in endless torment long after death! Wuu… wuu… wuu…"

The Magistrate: "Very well. Given the constraints of time, I note that you cooperated fully by recounting your experiences for Ayù's book *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. You have also brought forth a good vow, hoping all people will refrain from angling and avoid damnation in hell. I shall record one meritorious deed to your name and grant you permission to attend one Dharma-talk given by Earth Store Bodhisattva, so your torments may be temporarily suspended."

The Solitary Soul Yaksha: "Understood, Magistrate. I shall take him there at once."

Ayù: "May I inquire why this soul is permitted to hear the Bodhisattva's Dharma-talk immediately? Other condemned souls I interviewed endured far greater agony and terror. Why did you not record a meritorious deed for them?"

The Magistrate: "Ayù, hell manifests from the black karma created when living beings transgress moral precepts. Souls fall

into hell drawn by their own deeds. This man practiced Buddha recitation in one of his past lives, though his practice lacked diligence. He performed many acts of charity back then but failed to dedicate the meritorious virtues in accordance with the Dharma. The fruits of those good deeds ripened into his wealth and prosperity in this lifetime. Tragically, he squandered his blessing rewards prematurely and fell into hell.

"Karmic ties bind you two together. Your interview stirred his desire to escape suffering and prompted his sincere good vow. It is his own wholesome thought that earned him this recorded merit; I show no personal favoritism. 'If one wishes to fully understand all Buddhas of the three periods of time, one should contemplate the nature of the Dharma realm: Everything is created by the mind only.'"

The Magistrate: "It grows late, Ayù. A full night has passed in the mortal world. You may return home now. Do come back soon."

I pressed my palms together and bowed to the Magistrate. "I am deeply thankful to you. I shall certainly visit again as soon as I can."

19 / Ayù Pays Homage to the City God

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha, I departed riding a white lotus flower.

"*Namo Amitabha*!" I pressed my palms together and bowed to the Magistrate!

Ayù: "Magistrate, I have seen City God Temples and countless small shrines enshrining Earth Gods in the mortal world. What exactly distinguishes the City God from the Earth God? If there is a City God, I hope you may take me to visit him."

The Magistrate: "The duties of City Gods and Earth Gods serve much the same purpose. Their primary task is safeguarding mortals and granting them safe travels. The title 'Earth God' has grown especially popular among people over the past thousand years and has been passed down through generations. I briefly explained the responsibilities of Earth Gods previously. As worldly affairs in the mortal world keep evolving, the netherworld has appointed more Earth Gods to oversee and protect mortal beings accordingly.

"Within the netherworld stands the City God's Mansion. The City God holds the highest rank here, with numerous netherworld clerks serving under him, part of whom are Earth Gods. All Earth Gods receive orders and assist the City God. The City God takes charge of all records concerning the transmigration of every soul across Jambudvīpa. Inside the mansion lies the Palace of Hidden Virtue, which exclusively documents major virtuous deeds of mortal people. It also serves as a secondary central archive storing transmigration files of all mortal people.

"If you wish to know where you lived in past lives, your former status, whether you were male or female, and any great good deeds you performed, as long as your successive rebirths took place within Jambudvīpa, the City God can recount every identity and karmic imprint accumulated through your cycles of

reincarnation in full detail. Naturally, this does not mean the City God remains unaware of your circumstances if you are not reborn in Jambudvīpa. It is simply that, should you take rebirth in other lands, those places lie outside the scope under the City God's jurisdiction and record-keeping.

"The City God of this netherworld was dispatched by the Heavenly Court when the netherworld was first founded. You may interview him in person soon to resolve your doubts. Now follow me, and we shall tour the mansion. It stands at the far eastern reaches of the netherworld."

Ayù: "I am deeply grateful to you, Magistrate. Thank you for leading the way."

My heart brimmed with joy at the prospect of meeting the legendary ancient City God. I pondered what questions I ought to ask him. Ashamed of being an ordinary mortal lacking virtue and worthy conduct, I rethought my plan. Instead, I wished to inquire about the Nether Sovereign Yama King, the supreme ruler of the underworld: why did he take up the position of judging souls in hell? Everyone trembles in fear before him, and I hoped to get clarity on this matter shortly. We drew near, and the sprawling ancient edifice came into view. We gently landed on level ground.

The stately, antique brown City God's Mansion unfolded before our eyes. Its gatekeepers were not yakshas, but two warriors dressed in ancient attire and armed with traditional weapons. They greeted the Magistrate with respectful smiles and bows.

They bowed low and said: "The Left Door God greets you, Magistrate! The Right Door God greets you, Magistrate!"

The Left Door God continued: "Our Lord City God has given us instructions. He said that you, Magistrate, would bring Shangguan Yuhua, the mortal author of The Inexorable Laws of the Nether Realm, who bears a nether-world token on her person, to visit our Lord City God. Presumably, the mortal standing beside you is Shangguan Yuhua!" The two door gods simultaneously cast their gaze toward the token hanging upon me.

The Magistrate said: “Rise! This is none other than Shangguan Yuhua, Lay Buddhist Ayù, author of *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. Let the Left Door God lead the way to audience with the City God.”

The two door gods were not ferocious in appearance, merely tall, robust like ancient warriors. The mansion was vast, befitting a official’s residence in the underworld. Several attendants dressed as Earth Gods walked about the grounds, smiling and offering polite bows upon seeing the Magistrate.

Straight ahead stood two large paifang (archways). The left bore the inscription: Blessings Endure through Hidden Virtue; the right bore: Blessings Fade Swiftly through Manifest Virtue. Centered above the main hall were three large characters: Palace of Blessing and Virtue.

The Left Door God gestured: “Please enter, Magistrate and Lay Buddhist Ayù. His Honor the City God is attending to official affairs within the main hall.”

The City God took the form of a benevolent ancient elder clad in heavy traditional robes. He greeted us with a gentle smile.

“I, Shangguan Yuhua, am paying my respects to you, the City God. I have come today to ask you a question: What karmic conditions led the Nether Sovereign Yama King to hold the highest authority in the netherworld?

I have known of the impartial Yama King since childhood. I first heard tales of him from my grandmother. When I was little, I often watched her being bullied, shouted at and beaten by her daughters-in-law, yet she endured everything quietly and never complained to my father or uncles. She firmly believed that the stern Yama King presides over the netherworld, and constantly taught me that forbearance ought to guide all interpersonal relationships. Her words often linger in my mind: ‘Child, remember this. Do not fear suffering losses or being wronged and misunderstood. We act in the mortal world, and heaven watches all deeds. Everyone must die one day, and the Yama King in the afterlife will judge everything fairly. As long as you never wrong

others, there is no need to care about unfair treatment. Within a family, someone must shoulder burdens to ease tensions. Though your aunts spoke and acted harshly, as an elder I ought to bear it alone to keep the household harmonious. Never imitate their vicious, abusive conduct, or you will be disliked in your future marital home. A woman must cultivate forbearance. Never harm anyone. Let others wrong me, but I will never wrong them. Let go of petty grievances, for heaven and Yama King see all things.' I grew up hearing how omniscient and just Yama King is. I wish to enquire why he chose to serve as the ruler presiding over hell."

The City God: "Welcome to the netherworld, Ayù. All officials here fully support the publication of *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. Every single thing in existence follows the law of karma and retribution. In one past life, you and your grandmother were mother and daughter. Back then, she mocked you for worshipping the Buddha, though she did nothing more harmful. When the karmic conditions from that mockery ripened, it caused her hunched posture and the mistreatment she endured within her family in this lifetime.

Yet amid all these adversities and stress at home, she never harbored angry resentment that would generate heavy black karma. By patiently accepting hardship, she gradually expiated her past karmic debts and accumulated blessings for her later ascent to the heaven realms."

Every sentient being creates their own future lives through their own actions. All living beings create three types of karma: wholesome karma, unwholesome karma, and indeterminate karma. Take three people buying identical black garments as an example. Person A purchases the clothes to give to poor neighbors; black fabric does not show dirt easily and is convenient because it needs less frequent washing. This is wholesome karma, which will draw favorable karmic retributions in due time. Person B intends to wear the dark clothing to commit theft under cover of night. This constitutes unwholesome karma, destined to bring suffering

retribution. Person C acts with no particular purpose, buying the item merely on the shopkeeper's suggestion with no strong inclination either way. This is indeterminate karma, yielding neutral consequences.

Those with abundant wholesome karma attain rebirth as humans or celestial beings. Heavy unwholesome karma condemns beings to the hell, hungry ghost, or animal realms. Sentient beings dominated by indeterminate karma are mostly reborn in the human or ghost realms, still trapped within the three realms of existence. To transcend the three realms, break the cycle of birth and death, and attain ultimate eternal liberation, one must observe the precepts, recite the Buddha's name, practice wholesome deeds, cultivate hidden virtue, bring forth the supreme Bodhi mind, and make various virtuous vows so as to seek the unsurpassed Buddha Path above and deliver all afflicted living beings below. When making vows, one must make pure virtuous vows free from selfish and distracting thoughts. Even if one's virtuous vows hold the slightest selfish minds and distracting ideas, the person will have to bear the karmic retribution brought by these selfish minds and distracting ideas in the future.

Why did the Nether Sovereign Yama King become the supreme ruler of the nether realm? In one of his past lives, he was an upright and valiant general commanding a large army. During a great battle, he was outwitted by the enemy's treacherous schemes and suffered a crushing defeat. Overwhelmed with grief, the general swore an oath to heaven: 'I have been defeated against my will. If I get the chance in the future, I shall seek vengeance and severely punish all lawbreakers and deceitful wrongdoers. I will compel them to sincerely repent, turn over a new leaf, and become good people once again.'

His soldiers echoed his vow, resolving together to punish all unlawful and treacherous criminals. When the general made this sorrowful oath, he also harbored resentment toward himself for

failing to take proper precautions, which had caused his troops to suffer defeat alongside him. This self-reproach stemmed from anger and affliction; his virtuous resolve was tainted with the malicious vow of vengeance. It was this mixed oath that destined him to become Yama King, ruler of the Underworld.

Today, the Nether Sovereign Yama King endures the torment of scalding sand poured down his throat three times daily: morning, noon and evening, for fifteen minutes each time. As soon as his punishment begins, the two yakshas tasked with disciplining him seize him firmly. One holds his head fast, while the other pours blazing iron sand straight down his throat until he faints from agony. He is then roused by karmic winds, and the yakshas repeat the torture continuously for the full fifteen minutes. Once the time elapses, he regains consciousness naturally, and all returns to normal.

The agony of having hot iron sand poured down his throat is the karmic retribution for his vengeful oath in that former life. Countless people in the mortal world utter petty and grave malicious vows every single day. The moment someone makes an evil vow, their bodily aura dims instantly. The negative magnetic field of such vows binds the person tightly across countless lifetimes.

If a person's pre-heaven bodily aura is damaged, their life will be full of obstacles and hardships. They can only get relief through timely sincere and pure repentance and never repeat wrongdoings. If those who uttered evil vows have less virtuous karma than evil karma before karmic retribution comes, and never meet advisors of good knowledge to guide them into repentance, they will remain fettered by the negative magnetic field of their evil vows until the evil karmic consequences ripen, and then they will experience boundless suffering.

I hope you can finish this article soon to warn people against making evil vows. Those who made evil vows before ought to repent quickly. One may then bring forth immeasurable virtuous

aspirations, put them into practice, and diligently strive to fulfill these good vows.

Nowadays, most people in the mortal world break moral precepts while few abide by them. The poor overall magnetic field is also a major factor that makes people's thoughts prone to going astray.

If there are sentient beings burdened by heavy black karma who temporarily lack all the necessary conditions for observing the precepts, they need neither worry nor lose heart, for those with light karma would not be born into the Saha World. First, one must arouse the resolve to repent one's past black karma. Then one should make the vow: "May I, life after life, possess the steadfast mind to observe the precepts." Furthermore, one should practice Buddha-recitation, keep a vegetarian diet, and diligently perform all manner of virtuous deeds. Then the quality of this being's future lives will surely gradually improve. Only by this means can one truly and thoroughly eradicate the evil karmas one has committed and escape suffering forever. Practicing in this way, one will inevitably have a bright prospect and progress steadily toward light and brightness.

Anyone who chances upon this article has accumulated some blessing rewards in past lives. Those who share, repost and spread it will earn two virtuous merits recorded in the netherworld; those who reform themselves alone will have one virtuous merit recorded.

I have fully explained the principles about evil vows tonight. Dawn is approaching in the mortal world. You may go back and write the article. Feel free to visit again later."

Ayù: "Very well! I bow reverently to you, City God. Thank you. I bow reverently to the Magistrate and give my thanks. I shall take my leave. *Namo Amitabha*!"

Ayù returned home by white lotus flower.

Appendices

Appendix I The Nether Penal Code Against Licentiousness

Of all karmic transgressions, licentiousness is the gravest. Such offenses bear heavy consequences in the mortal world, yet penalties in the netherworld are more severe. Its forms of chastisement are numerous; herein are the key provisions. All who read this text must take warning and exert self-restraint.

Those guilty of incest must be confined eternally in hell. Anyone who takes another's life shall perish, struck by lightning. Those who desecrate corpses incur the same punishment. Those who have already endured earthly punishment shall be spared the lightning calamity. Acts of filiality and loyalty may offset forty percent of one's sins; fifteen hundred major virtuous deeds likewise offset forty percent.

Those who rape widows shall die childless, endure torments in hell across five hundred kalpas, then be reborn as insects and ants for another five hundred kalpas, next as beasts and fowl for a further five hundred kalpas. After these fifteen hundred kalpas in total, they may finally reincarnate as humans, only to be born as prostitutes. Those who suffer earthly punishment shall be exempt from one hundred kalpas of torment. If the crime also involves murder, the penalty shall be raised by five grades. Loyal and filial deeds can halve the karmic debt; five hundred major virtuous deeds shall also serve as a fifty percent offset.

Those who seduce widows shall have no heirs for two generations. They shall endure four hundred kalpas of torment in hell, then live as insects and ants for another four hundred kalpas, and as beasts for a further four hundred kalpas. When reborn as humans again, they shall be born with physical disabilities. Those who have received earthly punishment shall be spared eighty kalpas of suffering. If the crime involves killing another person,

their punishment shall be raised by four grades. Acts of loyalty and filial piety can offset seventy percent of their karmic sins; five hundred moderate virtuous deeds shall likewise offset seventy percent.

Those who molest and entice widows shall have no heirs for three generations. They shall undergo three hundred kalpas of suffering in hell, spend three hundred kalpas being reincarnated as insects and ants, and another three hundred kalpas as beasts. Upon their next human rebirth, they shall live in poverty and humble circumstances. Those punished in the mortal realm shall be exempt from sixty kalpas of torment. Should murder be committed alongside the offence, penalties shall be increased by three grades. Deeds of loyalty and filial piety may offset ninety percent of sins; five hundred minor virtuous deeds shall also offset ninety percent.

Those who rape virgins shall have dissolute children. They shall endure four hundred kalpas of torment in hell, then pass four hundred kalpas as insects and ants, and another four hundred kalpas as beasts and fowls. When reborn as humans once more, they shall be born into servitude. Those who have received earthly punishment shall be spared one hundred kalpas of suffering. If the crime involves taking a life, the penalty shall be increased by four grades. Acts of loyalty and filial piety may offset half of their karmic sins; four hundred major virtuous deeds shall likewise offset half.

Those who seduce virgins shall leave their bloodline heirless for two generations. They shall suffer two hundred and fifty kalpas in hell, spend two hundred and fifty kalpas as insects and ants, and another two hundred and fifty kalpas as beasts and fowls. Their next human incarnation shall be afflicted with chronic illness. Those punished in the mortal world shall be exempt from seventy kalpas of torment. If murder is committed, penalties shall be raised by three grades. Loyal and filial deeds can

offset seventy percent of sins; four hundred moderate virtuous deeds provide the same offset.

Those who molest and entice virgins shall have their own wives and daughters suffer retribution on their behalf. They shall undergo one hundred kalpas of suffering in hell, one hundred kalpas as insects and ants, and another one hundred kalpas as beasts and fowls. Reborn as humans, they shall live a life of moderate poverty. Those who endure earthly punishment shall escape forty kalpas of hardship. Should the offence lead to homicide, the penalty is increased by two grades. Loyalty and filial piety may offset ninety percent of sins; four hundred minor virtuous deeds shall also offset ninety percent.

Those who rape married women shall have their wives and daughters bear retribution for their crimes. They shall endure three hundred and fifty kalpas of torment in hell, then three hundred and fifty kalpas as insects and ants, and another three hundred and fifty kalpas as beasts and fowls. When reborn as humans again, they shall become lowly attendants. Those who have received earthly punishment shall be spared one hundred kalpas of suffering. If the crime involves killing someone, the penalty shall be increased by three grades. Deeds of loyalty and filial piety may offset half their karmic sins; three hundred major virtuous deeds shall offset half as well.

Those who seduce married women shall have their lifespan shortened by two ji. According to *Baopuzi*, one ji equals three hundred days; yet according to the general rules in *Jinke Jiyao*, one ji stands for twelve years. The standard set forth in the general rules of *Jinke Jiyao* shall prevail. The offenders first endure one hundred years of torment in hell, then undergo one hundred kalpas as insects and ants, and one hundred kalpas as beasts and fowls. Upon their subsequent rebirth as humans, they shall lead a lonely life. Those who have already received punishment in the mortal realm shall be exempt from thirty kalpas of torment. If the transgression involves the loss of human life, penalties shall be

increased by two grades. Acts of loyalty and filial piety may offset seventy percent of the guilt; three hundred moderate virtuous deeds likewise offset seventy-percent of the guilt.

Those who molest and entice married women shall lose one ji of their lifespan. They shall endure seventy kalpas of agony in hell, seventy kalpas as insects and ants, and seventy kalpas as beasts and fowls. Reborn into humanity, they shall live in moderate poverty. Those who have faced mortal punishment shall escape twenty kalpas of hardship. Should a killing occur alongside the offence, the penalty shall be increased by one grade. Loyalty and filial piety may offset ninety percent of karmic transgressions; three hundred minor virtuous deeds shall also offset ninety percent.

All the three aforementioned categories: widows, virgins and married women, are unrelated persons by blood. If the victims are relatives of the offender, the punishment shall be doubled. For kin within mourning relations, the offence ranks second only to incest. Committing such acts during the bereavement period incurs penalties raised by three grades. Whether the victims are married maidservants or female servants, the punishment for licentious intercourse shall be judged in accordance with the above provisions. If the illicit relations are not consummated, the offender’s lifespan shall be shortened by half a ji (six years). Should the crime involve homicide, sentencing shall follow the rules for fully consummated adultery.

Those who engage in licentious relations with a prostitute shall have their lifespan shortened by half a year. Those who contract grave illnesses as a result shall have their lifespan shortened by one full year. Should they repent and reform, the lifespan reduction shall be remitted. Those who beget a child with a prostitute shall be reborn as a beast for an entire lifetime. Repentance and reformation can spare one from such bestial rebirth.

Those who commit licentious acts upon persons of the same sex (i.e., homosexual persons) shall incur the same karmic penalty as those who commit licentious offences against women. Those who commit licentious acts against individuals aged sixteen or older shall be judged according to the penalty for violating married women. Those who commit licentious acts against males under the age of sixteen shall be judged according to the penalty for violating virgins. Those who coerce young children shall be judged according to the penalty for consorting with prostitutes.

Those who compose obscene books shall have their lifespan reduced by two ji. Should harmful licentious incidents occur because others have read such books, the karmic guilt shall fall upon the authors themselves. If these books are not destroyed, the authors shall never attain rebirth. Those who film obscene plays or erotic imagery shall incur the same penalty as those who compose obscene books.

Those who publicize any licentious affair shall have their lifespan reduced by half a ji. Should a loss of human life result from such publicity, their lifespan shall be reduced by one ji. Those who gossip about private amorous scandals of households shall incur the same penalty. For those who repent and reform, all their offences shall be mitigated by degrees.

Appendix II Supplementary Chapter by Magistrate Lu *(Magistrate Lu, named Zhidao, lived during the Song Dynasty)*

Those who procure an abortion by means of medicine in connection with licentious conduct, thereby causing a human death, shall receive double karmic punishment for their offences.

Those who commit licentious acts with virgins above the age of twelve, whether by seduction or enticement, shall all be judged as perpetrators of rape. Should a human death result from such acts, they shall receive double karmic punishment.

Those who already have children yet take a concubine shall have their lifespan reduced by two years for each concubine taken. Those holding official scholarly honors shall forfeit eight-tenths of their honors instead of suffering lifespan reduction.

Those who scheme to entice a widow who has no intention of remarrying shall have their lifespan reduced by three years. If the widow intends to remarry of her own will, no lifespan reduction shall apply.

Those who marry a widow yet keep one of her children from her former husband's household shall have their lifespan reduced by two years. Should such a child die as a consequence, their lifespan shall be reduced by one ji.

Those who converse about licentious matters when meeting friends shall have their lifespan reduced by one month for every three such instances. Should their words lead others to commit licentious acts, their lifespan shall be reduced by three years. Those holding official scholarly honors shall have their honors suspended or deferred.

Those who encounter beauty in public, gazing and following the person with their eyes, shall have their lifespan reduced by half a month after three such instances. Those who feign courtesy yet harbor malicious intent shall have their lifespan reduced by one suan for a single instance. Original Note: One suan equals three months.

Those who delight in listening to obscene performances shall have their lifespan reduced by three months for each occasion. Those holding official scholarly honors shall have their honors suspended or deferred. Those who commission obscene performances shall have their lifespan reduced by one suan for each occasion. Should harm arise therefrom, they shall be reborn as beasts for one lifetime.

Those who delight in reading obscene books shall have their lifespan reduced by half a month for every three occasions. Should this conduct bring on illness, their lifespan shall be reduced by three years.

Those who seduce others into committing licentious acts shall incur punishment mitigated by two grades below the offence actually committed. The same penalty applies to fathers or elder-brothers who connive at licentious conduct by their juniors, as well as those who connive at such conduct among their servants.

Magistrate Lu states: Under these netherworld penalties, no licentious offence may be treated with the slightest leniency. Incestuous transgressions are especially grave. Whether an inferior violates a superior or an elder wrongs a youth, the offenders shall all fall into the Uninterrupted Hell after death. In the present age, moral customs have greatly declined. Such offences frequently appear among official households and scholarly descendants. Long-infected by bad habits, they grow accustomed to vice, deluded and devoid of shame, not knowing where their fate shall end. The divine immortals had no alternative but to petition the Jade Emperor to openly promulgate

the netherworld penalties throughout the mortal world without any concealment. Those who read these penal codes and resolve to repent shall have their sins mitigated. Those who practice loyalty and filial piety shall have their sins mitigated. Those who accumulate merits and virtues shall have their sins mitigated. Should one read this text yet refuse to repent and reform, and instead utter slander against it, one shall surely suffer evil retribution or be struck by lightning. Those who believe sincerely in this scripture and spread it widely shall be blessed accordingly: those who pass it on to one hundred people shall gain an extra ji (twelve years) of lifespan; those who spread it to two hundred people shall be granted children if they are childless; those who spread it to three hundred people shall gain an extra two ji (twenty-four years) of lifespan; those who spread it to four hundred people shall enjoy prosperous descendants; those who spread it to five hundred people shall enjoy successive official careers and scholarly honors; those who spread it to one thousand people shall have their names recorded on the Red Registers; those who disseminate it across the whole world shall become immortals after death. Spreading it among ten wealthy persons counts as spreading it to two hundred ordinary people; spreading it to one government official counts as spreading it to one hundred ordinary people. All these provisions were memorialized to the Jade Emperor by Emperor Fuyou and sanctioned for enforcement.

Note: When condemned souls endure kalpas in hell, each kalpa means undergoing the torments of one hell-realm once. Suffering in the netherworld differs greatly from mortal-world punishment. Though a condemned soul perishes under torment, it is restored to bodily form only to undergo the same tortures anew. Only upon completing its appointed kalpas is that particular karmic debt discharged. If other offences remain, the soul shall suffer further hellish torments according to its guilt. As recorded in Dongxuan Ji (Records of the Mysterious Netherworld), for those guilty of licentious transgressions, repentance and good conduct during

mortal life shall bring about remission of their sins after death. Those who refuse to reform even unto death shall be transferred from the First Hall to successive halls of judgment, to endure torment in the Heart-Piercing Hell, Bronze-Man Hell, Kidney-Slicing Hell, the Rat-Gnawing Hell, the Boiling-Cauldron Hell, the Cart-Crushing Hell and other great and minor hells. Those guilty of incest shall additionally be cast into special incest-related hells, or confined eternally in hell to suffer manifold tortures. Among punishments for licentious wrongs, incest carries especially heavy guilt. Condemned souls endure numerous kalpas in each of the aforementioned hells; only when these kalpas are fulfilled may they pass into transmigration. One cycle of rebirth counts as one kalpa. Furthermore, two texts, Jinke Jiyao (Essentials of the Golden Code) and Lunke Jiyao (Essentials of the Wheel Code), set forth detailed articles on rewarding virtue and punishing evil. These nether-world statutes likewise contain provisions for remission, aggravation of penalties, and offsetting of guilt, manifesting that good and evil are distinctly distinguished, with not the slightest deviation. By consulting the two Code texts together with Dongxuan Ji, one may perceive that karmic retribution is credible and well-attested.

Note: Jinke Jiyao (Essentials of the Golden Code) was revealed through planchette-writing by Emperor Wenchang at Chenjinlin, Leigu Bridge, Liling County, Hunan Province, in the sixth year of the Xianfeng reign of the Qing Dynasty (1856). This code was originally ordained by the Supreme Emperor and kept secret inside a jade casket. Emperor Wenchang earnestly petitioned for the Celestial Mandate to have it promulgated among mortals in the human world, expounding the Heavenly Statutes, also known as the Yang Laws. These laws punish earthly misdeeds and unleash disasters and karmic tribulations to chasten the hearts of wrongdoers. In the third year of the Guangxu reign of the Qing Dynasty (1877), the Literary Emperor and the Martial Emperor petitioned the Jade Emperor and received his approval to issue

Lunke Jiyao (Essentials of the Wheel Code), laying open the nether laws. These statutes judge people's sins and inflict punishments within the hells to chastise condemned souls. Afterwards, numerous immortals collated and supplemented its contents. This book carries forward the divine tenets omitted in Jinke Jiyao. The full manuscript was transcribed via divine planchette-writing and disseminated far and wide across the human world.

Appendix III Rules of Merit and Demerit of Divine Emperor Wenchang — Supplement on Sexual Misconduct

Merit Rules Against Licentiousness

1. One merit for maintaining no lascivious thought for a full day and night.

2. One merit for keeping no obscene books or lewd-paintings in one's possession. (This shall also include not keeping pornographic videos and the like.)

3. One merit each time for avoiding places of debauchery. (This shall also include not visiting pornographic-websites nor frequenting improper establishments and the like.)

4. Five merits for refraining from lingering glances upon an attractive person. (When encountering scantily-clad women and the like in public streets and refraining from looking, one gains five merits for each instance.)

5. Ten merits for practising sexual temperance within one's household.

6. One hundred merits for constantly bearing sage-divine principles in mind and observing strict self-discipline even in private chambers. (Constantly bearing in mind the divine teachings, and refraining from licentious conduct when confronted with sexual temptations in places unseen by others.)

7. One hundred merits for preserving the chastity of a maid-servant.

8. One hundred merits for remaining uncorrupted when placed in circumstances that could incite licentiousness. (Such as when someone offers improper advances, or when risky situations arise in social gatherings…)

9. Three hundred merits for authoring one volume of writings that warn against sexual immorality. (If lacking the time [for personal practice], assisting in the printing of virtuous books such as

Shoukang Baojian that exhort people to abstain from sexual licentiousness shall also earn one a measure of merits.)

10. Three hundred merits for destroying the printing blocks of an

obscene work. (To terminate the sources that breed licentiousness is to save countless people. In this age of advanced technology, every optical disc may serve as a master copy; destroying such material yields merit swiftly.)

11. One thousand merits for having no second sexual partner in one's

lifetime. (Besides one's lawful wife, one takes no other women throughout life.)

Demerit Rules Against Licentiousness

1. Boundless demerits for creating and circulating obscene books or

lascivious paintings. (This also includes disseminating all kinds of

pornographic information.) 2. One thousand demerits for causing another's death through licentious

conduct. 3. One thousand demerits for procuring an abortion arising from illicit

sexual relations. (This refers to intentional abortion outside wedlock, a

grave offence. Women are exhorted to preserve their self-integrity,

protect their bodies well, and refrain from taking a life.) 4. Five hundred demerits for seducing a young girl into sexual

intercourse. 5. One hundred demerits for abandoning oneself to debauchery and

bringing sorrow to one's parents. 6. One hundred demerits for falling ill due to lustful desires and causing

distress to one's parents. (An additional one-hundred demerits are

incurred for sickness brought on by lechery.) 7. Fifty demerits for concocting aphrodisiac prescriptions. (Such as

preparing love-potions. Those who sell such substances incur the same

demerit.) 8. Thirty demerits for consorting with a prostitute once. 9. Twenty demerits for making indecent advances toward an attractive

person. 10. Ten demerits for commenting upon a woman's physical beauty. 11. Five demerits for indulging in indecent sexual acts at improper times

within the household. 12. Three demerits per day for keeping obscene images, texts or verses.

(This applies to all forms of stored pornographic material: ninety

demerits a month, well over one thousand demerits in a single year.

Destroy and discard such items without delay, lest harm befall others.) 13. One demerit per instance for composing an obscene poem. 14. One demerit per instance for uttering lewd words. (This includes telling

bawdy jokes.) 15. One demerit per instance for casting a lingering gaze upon an attractive

person. 16. One demerit per hour for harboring recurring licentious thoughts.

Appendix IV Brief Record of Merits and Demerits for Women's Virtuous Conduct

Merit Rules for Women's Conduct

1. One merit per day for maintaining dignified bearing in daily dwelling.

2. One merit per day for behaving discreetly and keeping properly within the inner quarters.

3. Ten merits for observing the rule of no physical contact between unrelated men and women on each occasion.

4. Ten merits for not wantonly revealing suggestive speech or demeanor.

5. One hundred merits for being dignified, quiet and gentle.

6. One hundred merits for being prudent in every gesture and movement.

7. One hundred merits for abiding in plain, simple raiment throughout one's lifetime and eschewing ornate adornment. (This means living frugally in household management all one's days and not seeking lavish splendor.)

8. One hundred merits for eschewing elaborate makeup and finery.

9. One thousand merits for teaching daughters to be virtuous and abide by feminine precepts.

10. Boundless merits for preserving chastity amid hardship. (For a

woman to maintain her chastity throughout her lifetime and take no second man yields greater merit than a man who abstains from multiple sexual partners all his days.)

11. Boundless merits for choosing death rather than submitting when

encountering violent sexual assault.

12. Boundless merits for harboring no licentious thoughts throughout

life and exercising constant self-restraint.

Demerit Rules for Women's Conduct

1. Boundless demerits for losing one's chastity. (This refers to a woman willfully engaging in licentious relations with others.

Those who advocate licentiousness will never take responsibility. Sexual relations with anyone other than one's lawful husband incur grave karmic transgressions.)

2. Three hundred demerits for procuring an abortion. (This refers to intentional abortion within wedlock. Since abortion is tantamount to taking a human life, demerits shall still be recorded.)

3. Ten demerits for engaging in an improper private conversation with an unrelated man, per instance.

4. One demerit for frivolous behavior, per instance.

Appendix V Articles on Offences of Licentious Karma

Cultivating one's conduct and nurturing one's nature begin above all with abstaining from licentious desires. Otherwise, licentiousness injures one's vital essence internally and corrupts one's conduct externally. The harm of licentiousness is like a sharp-edged steel knife, scraping away essence and gnawing at the bones, draining one's original vitality completely. One who seeks the cultivation of Dao can achieve no accomplishment thereby. Worse still, one given to licentiousness corrupts ethical and moral principles and commits exceptionally grave karmic transgressions. Therefore, one must exercise great caution. The statutes are set forth below:

1. Those who commit adultery in violation of ethical norms shall receive no pardon. Those whose adulterous act remains unconsummated shall have the penalty reduced by one grade.

2. No pardon for those who indulge in licentious acts beneath the sun, moon and stars, before deities or Buddhas, within temples and shrines, or on parents' birthdays and death anniversaries. No pardon for those who rape chaste women, widows or nuns.

3. No pardon for offences committed on the Jade Emperor's sacred birthday, nor at the time of a parent's passing.

For the above-mentioned unpardonable offences, each transgression counts as one hundred demerits. The offender's allotted life span shall be reduced by three years, and his wealth and rank shall be demoted by one grade. Rape incurs one additional penalty grade. Those who cause loss of human-life in the offense incur two further penalty grades. In accordance with the gravity of the guilt, grade-one offenses bring retribution by heavenly thunder; grade-two offences by divine execution; and grade-three offenses draw karmic retribution through flood, fire

and conflagration. While accumulated merits and virtues may offset these unpardonable transgressions, the offender must still stand trial and receive chastisement.

4. Five hundred demerits for raping and violating the chastity of chaste women, widows or nuns. Four hundred demerits for plot-driven seduction. Three hundred demerits for consensual illicit intercourse, accompanied by a one-year reduction of one's lifespan and a one-grade demotion of wealth and rank. The

penalty shall be reduced by one grade if the act is not consummated. One hundred demerits for lewd teasing.

5. Regarding married women separated from their husbands, reformed courtesans, the beloved of another person, maids and female servants: one hundred demerits for rape; fifty demerits for plotted seduction; twenty demerits for consensual illicit intercourse, accompanied by a one-year reduction of one's allotted lifespan and a one-grade demotion of wealth and rank. The penalty shall be reduced by one grade if the act is not consummated. Ten demerits for lewd teasing.

6. Five demerits for lustful gazing with the eyes. Upon the accumulation of ten offenses, the offender's lifespan shall be reduced by one year, and his emolument shall be demoted for six months. In the present life, one shall suffer eye disorders. After death, one shall fall into the Eye-Digging Hell and Eye-Piercing Hell; in subsequent reincarnation, one shall be blind.

7. Five demerits for lustful listening with the ears. Upon the accumulation of ten offenses, the offender's lifespan and emolument shall be reduced as aforesaid. In the present life, one shall endure ear sores, inflammatory swellings, pus-bloody discharges and ear blockages. After death, one shall fall into the Ear-Digging Hell and the Hell of Worms Burrowing into Ears; in subsequent reincarnation, one shall be deaf, disabled and slow-witted.

8. Ten demerits for lustful acts of the hands. Upon the accumulation of ten offenses, the offender's lifespan and

emolument shall be reduced as aforesaid. In the present life, one shall suffer boils, toxic abscesses and festering sores on the hands. After death, one shall fall into the Hell of Pulling out Fingernails and Toenails; in subsequent reincarnation, one shall have crippled hands and feet.

9. Lewd speech by mouth is divided into five grades according to gravity: one hundred demerits per utterance for the first grade; fifty demerits per utterance for the second grade; thirty demerits per utterance for the third grade; twenty demerits per utterance for the fourth grade; ten demerits per utterance for the fifth grade. Upon the accumulation of ten offenses, the offender's lifespan and emolument shall be reduced as aforesaid. In this life, one shall endure destitution and misfortune and die a violent death. After death, one shall fall into the Bronze-Pillar Hell. In reincarnation, males shall be reborn as female forms, and females

as courtesans to repay karmic debts. When karmic retribution is exhausted, one shall be reborn among moisture-born beings.

10. Ten demerits for bodily lewd acts. Upon the accumulation of ten

offenses, the offender's lifespan and emolument shall be reduced as aforesaid. In this present life, retribution takes the form of festering, pus-and-blood-oozing poisonous sores covering the whole body. After death, one falls into the Universal-Scourging Hell; upon rebirth, one shall be maimed, infirm and disabled.

For the above-mentioned articles concerning sexual transgressions, retribution is meted out according to the gravity of the offense once transgressions accumulate to a certain count; hence there exist punishments of varying severity.

Appendix VI Slay the Licentious Mind, Remove the Harm of Licentiousness

Verse:

When one beholds another's beauty and stirs amorous thoughts,
A bone-eating blade invades, and misfortune is self-invoked.
If one nurtures the spirit through the Three Jewels,
Cultivating virtue and sowing merit shall draw blessings unto oneself.

Licentiousness is the chief of all evils. A junzi remains vigilant, daring not to harbor even a single improper idea, and guards against any such idea as he would against a tiger. Hence the junzi's virtue suffices for firm self-preservation, lest any base virtue arise and bring about his ruin and disgrace. Upon seeing another's beauty, though a lustful idea arises yet no physical act is committed, the mind has already wandered and the spirit shifted. Once the mind wanders and the spirit shifts, the mental device of mind inevitably acts recklessly. Take heed! Take heed! Lust is a common human inclination, just as a fine object draws universal admiration; hence lust is hard to eradicate. When a lustful idea stirs, the mental device awakens; when the mind drifts, self-restraint falters. Even without occasion for gratification, the will is already disordered. Should opportunity arise, morality collapses; with morality lost, peril befalls the person. To guard against the peril of lust, one must first discipline one's own mind. Let not the mind drift; be vigilant before ideas arise. When ideas originate from the mind, the eyes are the thieves and the ears are the robbers. These thieves and robbers assail from within, leaving body and mind without mastery. Therefore, while restraining the inner mind, one must also guard the eyes and ears outwardly.

When eyes and ears cease to function, the mind becomes settled and one's ideas become upright. To be upright is to harbor no depraved ideas within the mind; this is what is meant by slaying the mind. To slay the mind, one must maintain a strict vigilance at the birth of every idea and caution over every stirring of the intention. To harbor private lustful longing upon seeing another's beauty incurs karmic punishment according to the precepts, whether or not the act is consummated.

Now the statutes are set forth below:

1. All transgressions of sexual misconduct related to the ears and eyes: being mentally stirred upon hearing tempting sounds, gazing and lingering with the eyes, stealthily peeking with covert intent, chasing lascivious thoughts and fantasies, casting coquettish or sidelong glances, or gazing directly at tempting objects. Each instance incurs five demerits; forty instances amount to one offence. One offence deducts half a suan of one's lifespan. A hundred offences deduct three suan of lifespan and downgrade one's rank of wealth and nobility by one grade. If no rank remains to be downgraded, the offender's lifespan shall be shortened by half a ji (namely six years). Lifespan and emoluments are reduced according to the transgression, and the offender is entered into the register of the destitute. In this life, karmic retribution manifests as frustrated plans, hardship and utter failure. After death, one falls into the Copper-Pillar Hell and the Slaughter-Cutting Hell. Upon rebirth as a human, one shall suffer festering defects of the ears and eyes, and endure poverty and wretchedness.

2. All mouth-related transgressions of sexual misconduct: delighting in lewd speech, uttering crafty jests that disturb others' mental resolve, elaborately depicting obscene conduct, uttering slanderous and false words to defame others' reputations, and recklessly divulging private boudoir affairs. Each instance incurs ten demerits; twenty instances constitute one offence. One offence deducts half a suan of one's lifespan. A hundred offences deduct

three suan of lifespan and downgrade one's rank of wealth and nobility by one grade. If no rank remains to be downgraded, the offender's lifespan shall be shortened by half a ji. Lifespan and emoluments are reduced according to the offence, and the offender is entered into the register of the ruined. In this life, karmic retribution takes the form of successive misfortunes, legal calamities, constant ruin and a violent death. After death, one falls into the Vajra Hell, the Cauldron-Boiling Hell, and the Slaughter-Cutting Hell. Upon rebirth as a human, one shall be disfigured: crooked nose and mouth, missing or protruding teeth, scorched and festering facial features, bulging eyes, stammering, and the like.

3. All hand-related transgressions of sexual misconduct: harboring lustful thoughts while moving the hands, committing indecent acts with the hands, taking chances to press against another's body, seductively teasing, embracing and making lewd advances, and other indecent manual acts. Such transgressions are graded into three degrees according to gravity. Each Grade-3 instance incurs five demerits; each Grade-2 instance, fifteen demerits; each Grade-1 instance, fifty demerits. (Lifespan deductions follow the two preceding articles.) Lifespan and emoluments are reduced according to the offences, and the offender is entered into the register of premature death. In this life, karmic retribution manifests as legal calamities, premature demise, destitution and hardship. After death, one falls into the Copper-Pillar Hell and the Slaughter-Cutting Hell. Upon rebirth as a human, one shall suffer contracted hands and feet, impaired mobility, crooked fists or missing fingers, festering sores on the hands, hemiplegia, and the like.

4. All ear-related transgressions of sexual misconduct: delighting in lewd talk, letting one's mind become bewitched, pursuing sexual misconduct to the neglect of proper duties. Transgressions are graded into three degrees according to gravity. Each Grade-3 instance incurs five demerits; each Grade-2 instance,

ten demerits; each Grade-1 instance, twenty demerits. (Lifespan deductions follow the three preceding articles.) Lifespan and emoluments are reduced according to the offence, and the offender is entered into the register of collapse and ruin. In this life, karmic retribution manifests as unceasing dire calamities, ruin and adversity. After death, one falls into the Vajra Hell, the Slaughter-Cutting Hell, and the Cauldron-Boiling Hell. Upon rebirth as a human, one shall be disfigured (including the disfigurements listed in the two prior articles, additionally warts, cleft-lip, missing teeth, and so forth).

The above articles concern the sexual transgressions of the ear, eye, hand and mouth. Of these, transgressions of the hand and mouth are most apt to corrode virtue, even to the point of destroying another's reputation and endangering life; hence they are graded by severity to determine due punishment.

5. All pen-related transgressions of sexual misconduct: composing lewd verses and bawdy ballads, circulating obscene texts whose publication harms the world, painting pornographic images to bewilder others' minds, fabricating unsubstantiated tales to ruin others' honor, inventing slanderous lewd allegations that breed calamity and harm others. Offences are divided into three grades. For Grade-3, every five characters incur one demerit; for Grade-2, every single character incurs one demerit; for Grade-1, every single character incurs three demerits. The deduction of lifespan and emoluments is increased by three grades, and they are further reduced according to the offences, and the offender is entered into the register of heir-extinction. Grade-1 retribution comes in the form of heavenly chastisement; Grade-2 brings great calamity that exterminates one's household; Grade-3 brings unprovoked misfortune, malignant ailments and violent death, or wretchedness and a violent death. For those who cause others to lose their lives, retribution arrives as vengeful violent death or swift calamity leading to a violent death. If the offender has a spouse, children or descendants, they shall suffer

retribution through lewd disorder within the family. After death, one falls into the Vajra Hell, the Cauldron-Boiling Hell, the Copper-Pillar Hell, or the Avīci Hell. Rebirth occurs only after all circulated works have been completely eradicated. One may be reborn female, reborn into hardship and destitution, or reborn among aquatic beings, enduring want and begging without a good end, before being reborn as sows or bitches.

6. All mind-related transgressions of sexual misconduct: harboring delusional cravings when illicit unions fail to materialize, nurturing vengeful intent when schemes of seduction miscarry, growing infatuation upon beholding another's beauty, fostering resentment when others possess what one lacks, succumbing to jealousy when others are fair while one is ugly, indulging in lustful fantasies upon seeing another's grace and tenderness. Each Grade-1 instance incurs one hundred demerits; each Grade-2 instance, fifty demerits; each Grade-3 instance, twenty demerits. Lifespan and emoluments are reduced according to the offence, and the offender is entered into the register of collapse and ruin. Grade-1 retribution consists of crushing adversity, ruinous calamity and violent death; Grade-2 brings successive swift misfortunes and hardship; Grade-3 brings unprovoked disaster and ruin. After death, one falls into the Cold-Gloom Hell, the Fire-Chariot Hell, and the Universal-Scourging Hell. Upon rebirth, one shall live maimed and displaced, in poverty and wretchedness.

7. The offence of frequenting courtesans with reckless abandon and conceiving lust for those of beauty: ten penalties. Lifespan and emoluments are reduced according to the offence, and the offender is entered into the register of the destitute. In this life, karmic retribution manifests as hardship, want and wretchedness. After death, one falls into the Vajra Hell and the Cauldron-Boiling Hell. Upon rebirth one is female, wandering and begging, before being reborn as aquatic fowl.

8. The transgressions of licentious promiscuity, priding oneself on romantic prowess, and conceiving lust for those of beauty: ten penalties. Lifespan and emoluments are reduced according to the offence, and the offender is entered into the register of sickness and adversity. In this life, retribution arrives through unprovoked calamity, malignant illness and violent death. After death, one falls into the Universal-Scourging Hell and the Copper-Pillar Hell. Reborn with bodily defects and festering sores, one wanders about begging.

9. All theft-type transgressions of sexual misconduct: bribing for illicit intercourse, contriving schemes to seduce others, using bribes to entrap others into sexual acts. Fifteen penalties. Lifespan and emoluments are reduced according to the offence, and the offender is entered into the register of collapse and ruin. In this life, retribution comes via official punishment and ruin, or unprovoked affliction and swift calamity. After death, one falls into the Cauldron-Boiling Hell, the Slaughter-Cutting Hell, and the Universal-Scourging Hell. Reborn female, one becomes a servant, slave or prostitute, before subsequent rebirth as beasts such as tigers, wolves, jackals and leopards.

10. All transgressions of sexual misconduct committed through coercive authority: committing sexual offences by virtue of power, compelling others into intercourse under pretext. Fifteen penalties. Lifespan and emoluments are reduced according to the offence, and the offender is entered into the register of ruin and fracture. In this life, retribution manifests as successive unprovoked misfortunes, malignant ailments and violent death. After death, one falls into the Vajra Hell, the Cold-Gloom Hell, and the Slaughter-Cutting Hell. Upon rebirth one is maimed, destitute and without support, enduring constant hardship, before being reborn among aquatic creatures or ferocious beasts.

11. All transgressions of sexual misconduct involving abduction and rape: seizing others for rape, engaging in group sexual violence, intoxicating others to violate them, compelling

and seizing persons for intercourse. Fifteen penalties. Lifespan and emoluments are reduced, and the offender is entered into the register of utter overthrow. In this life, retribution brings ruin, displacement, destitution, malignant sickness and violent death. After death, one falls into the Slaughter-Cutting Hell and the Copper-Pillar Hell. Reborn female, one becomes a prostitute, before subsequent rebirth as oxen or dogs.

12. All theft-type transgressions of sexual misconduct: beguiling others through crafty stratagems, seizing sexual favors by opportunistic means. Fifteen penalties. Lifespan and emoluments are reduced according to the offence, and the offender is entered into the register of the down-trodden. In this life, retribution consists of official punishment, unprovoked disaster and abject ruin. After death, one falls into the Fire-Chariot Hell, the Cold-Gloom Hell, and the Universal-Scourging Hell. Reborn maimed with festering sores and reduced to destitution, one is later reborn among aquatic beings.

Appendix VII Explanatory Annotations on Divine Sovereign Guan Sheng's Scripture on Abstaining from Licentiousness

The Author's Preface

Social mores are gradually becoming depraved in current times, and licentious conduct is especially prevalent. With open social communication, many married men seek casual extramarital affairs, regarding themselves as romantic and unrestrained; some married women pursue clandestine lovers outside wedlock, boasting of such deeds as noble conduct. Influenced by foreign customs, young people indulge in pornographic publications that disturb their minds, as well as romantic dramas that distract their souls. Unable to control their carnal urges, they constantly breach moral bounds. When these relationships fail to come to fruition, endless tragedies follow, which is truly pitiful. The sacred ethical bonds of humanity have degraded into mere animalistic desire. Furthermore, many wicked people abuse and rape innocent women, and their grave sins can never be pardoned. The hells are packed with condemned souls punished for sexual offences. Those who commit such misdeeds ought to wake up promptly and mend their ways.

Bustling streets are lined with venues catering to immoral lust, some running openly and others operating covertly. Though the authorities impose strict bans, diabolically cunning operators, blinded by greed, dare to defy the law for profit. Lustful crowds flock to these places, squandering money and ruining their health to indulge themselves. Many contract venereal diseases that plague themselves and afflict future generations, triggering

marital discord and countless broken families. Indecent cases frequently appear in news reports; some even develop into fatal killings caused by distorted infatuation. From this, one can catch a glimpse of the undeniable truth that licentious desire brings greater disasters than floods and ferocious beasts. As an ancient proverb runs: Licentiousness ranks first among all evils; never embark on this road to perdition. How can people ignore this solemn warning?

The Divine Sovereign proclaims: Licentiousness is the chief of all evils; filiality is the foremost of all virtues.

Explanatory Note: The Divine Sovereign states, “Licentiousness is the chief of all evils; Filiality is the foremost of all virtues.” To visit prostitutes constitutes licentiousness; illicit affairs with married women of other households also count as licentious conduct. “All evils” refers to every kind of wicked deed. The word “chief” here means the primary one. Though countless evils exist in the world, violating other men’s wives and daughters and ruining their chastity ranks as the gravest sin of all.

“Filiality is the foremost of all virtues.” Filiality refers to filial piety. Filial piety means treating one’s parents with kindness and respect. It is the virtue of obedience: serving and complying with one’s parents in all things to bring them joy. “All virtues” refers to every form of good conduct. “Foremost” means filial piety ought to be practiced above everything else. While living in the world, one must prioritize filial piety to repay parents for their arduous toil; all other good deeds may come second. In the Classic of Filiality, Confucius states that among three thousand offences punishable under the five major penalties, none is worse than unfilial conduct. Hence practicing filial piety builds immense merits and virtues, whereas being unfilial incurs grave sins. The opening chapter of the Analects expounds that filial piety and fraternal respect form the foundation of human conduct. The teachings of immortals and Buddhas list cultivating filial piety and fraternal duty as the first rule to uphold ethical human relations.

These are ample proofs that countless sacred sutras and classics all place filial piety and fraternal respect foremost among virtues.

Those who defile others through licentious acts bring destruction upon the victim's three generations.

For a wife or daughter to be violated is the greatest disgrace among mortals. Three generations refers to three successive generations. The wrongdoer shames the victim's forebears in the nether-world, brings public dishonor upon the victim's fathers, brothers and husbands, and leaves the victim's children with no prospect of standing in the world. By ruining another's chastity and bringing shame upon the victim's ancestors, descendants and clan, such acts are heinous, far worse than the crime of murder.

Once the licentious misconduct comes to light, the scandal spreads far and wide.

"Comes to light" means that the illicit liaison is uncovered by others. "The scandal" signifies a dishonored reputation. "Spreads far and wide" means the affair may be published in newspapers, spoken of throughout villages and hamlets, and circulated among folk in every county and city.

Her father disowns her as his daughter; her husband rejects her as his wife; her son refuses to acknowledge her as his mother.

When a woman falls into lechery, her father, husband and children are steeped in shame, too ashamed to face others, eager to hide the scandal. How could they acknowledge her as daughter, wife or mother?

In extreme cases, blades are drawn, and both man and woman perish.

When the sin of seducing another's wife or daughter becomes known, murder often ensues, and in some cases the adulterer and the woman lose their lives.

Their bodies lie exposed, bringing disgrace to the whole clan.

When murder occurs and lives are lost, officials must come to examine the corpses, which are left uncovered. When people ask which clan produced those who died for adultery, their whole kin-group is put to shame.

People ask: "Whose daughter is this, reared without proper teaching? Whose man behaves no better than brute beasts?"

"Without proper teaching" means lacking family moral instruction. "No better than brute beasts" means behaving like livestock, devoid of propriety and shame. When folk name the household from which these wrongdoers come, the entire family bears the disgrace.

Some exchange secret floral gifts of peonies and orchids to deepen their forbidden affection.

Lovers may secretly exchange floral tokens, deepening their secret bond, keeping all hidden from the world.

This may drive a wife to poison her lawful husband, for which she is condemned to capital punishment.

Eager to stay with her paramour, an unchaste wife may secretly buy poison to kill her husband. Once evidence emerges, authorities will punish her severely with the death penalty, to chastise such licentious wickedness.

Condemned to capital punishment, they see their souls scatter and perish.

A life must pay for a life, and lecherous crimes shall not be pardoned. When judges hear the case and pass a death sentence, once the verdict of capital punishment is pronounced, the condemned are utterly terrified, their souls torn asunder, with little hope of rebirth.

Fathers and sons wail in grief; mothers and daughters cling in agony. Crowds jeer and revile them, yet repentance comes far too late.

Parents arrive at the execution ground and behold their sons or daughters put to death. They can do nothing but weep bitterly. Thousands of onlookers laugh and curse, declaring that the

adulteress who poisoned her husband and her paramour deserve such an end. Though remorse may stir within them, it is already beyond remedy.

Yet those given to lechery remain unperturbed and devoid of shame.

"Unperturbed" means calm composure; "devoid of shame" means being utterly shameless. Those addicted to lechery feel unperturbed and show no sense of guilt whatsoever.

Though belonging to men of moral teachings, they willingly subvert the five constants and corrupt public customs.

Educated persons who understand principles stand within the realm of Confucian moral ethics. The five constants refer to humaneness, righteousness, ritual, wisdom and trustworthiness. Public customs stand for social morals. The text means that even learned, principled men may knowingly transgress norms, commit adultery with other men's women, and willingly perpetrate acts that corrupt public morals.

Some elder brothers seize their younger brothers' wives; younger brothers commit adultery with their elder brothers' spouses.

A younger brother's wife is his sister-in-law; an elder brother's wife is also a sister-in-law. To seize by force is to usurp; illicit intercourse is adultery. When an elder brother forcibly takes his younger brother's wife, or a younger brother lies with his elder brother's spouse, such brothers are true offenders against moral teachings.

Some uncles give way to covetous desire for their nephews' wives; some nephews enter illicit unions with their aunts-by-marriage.

Incestuous or improper carnal unions are all licentious liaisons. An uncle may behold his nephew's fair-faced wife and conceive wicked lust to defile her. A nephew may lust after his uncle's wife and contrive to consummate an illicit affair. Such men are beasts clad in human raiment.

They indulge in fleeting pleasure, caring only for immediate gratification.

"Pleasure" here means joy; gratification means amusement and ease. It means that the adulterer and adulteress rejoice in their adulterous trysts, thinking only of immediate comfort, giving no thought to the ruin that shall follow.

They are beset by misfortune and setbacks for half their lives, unaware of the ruin awaiting their descendants.

Those addicted to licentiousness often end in utter ruin and dishonor. Their own lives are dogged by hardship for half their days, and after their death, their descendants shall see their household crumble and perish.

Either their family line is cut off without heirs, or their offspring are reduced to beggars.

Descendants keep the ancestral incense burning; to have no children is to sever the ancestral offering line. To beg for food and alms is to live as a beggar. Even if lecherous men leave behind progeny, those descendants may well be reduced to begging.

Either their own wives and daughters pay the karmic debt through suffering, or their heirs fall into destitution and misfortune.

It is said that for a man given to lust, his own wives and daughters shall repay his karmic debt of lechery, suffering violation at the hands of others. Falling into destitution and misfortune means fallen fortunes, universal misfortune, and utter wretchedness of spirit.

Wandering ghosts in lonely graves, who shall burn paper money for you?!

When one dies, one becomes a ghost; earth heaped up makes a grave. Should one given to lechery die in a strange land and be buried among desolate hills, he becomes a lonely-graved wandering ghost. No one burns paper offerings for him.

Reckless dissolute youths, who will set forth sacrificial food for them?!

Frivolous, wayward young men given to lechery are often left without heirs. On birthdays and seasonal festivals, no one offers sacrificial viands in their honor.

When one reflects upon this, how can one but grieve!

As the Divine Sovereign speaks of and considers such fates, he feels deep sorrow for mankind.

Even hard-toiling farming youths turn frivolous and flighty.

It means that in addition to scholars, young men from rural village families also acquire frivolous habits and refuse to bow to hard labor.

Disregarding filial duty to parents and respect for elders, they bore through walls and climb over fences.

"Disregarding" means to give no thought. Parents are one's father and mother; elders are senior kin. To bore through walls is to pierce openings to spy on neighboring women. To climb over fences means to surmount. Some even scale walls to defile other men's wives. Frivolous youths cast off filial piety and fraternal respect, and take to adulterous, thieving and lewd acts.

Farmlands of southern plots and eastern suburbs have turned into parched wastelands.

Southern fields refer to farmlands in the south; eastern suburbs denote lands to the east. To turn means to transform things. Parchedness means grain shoots wither and die. Crops everywhere, left without weeding or manuring, wither and perish even if they once flourished.

Now they linger long in Qin towers and Chu mansions, oblivious to the passage of seasons.

Qin towers and Chu mansions here refer to pleasure quarters. Young farm-bred men become infatuated with brothels, lingering so long that they lose track of spring and autumn.

They sell ancestral estates to pay for debts incurred by debauchery, abandoning provisions meant for supporting their parents.

"Abandoning" means to discontinue. Provisions are grain and food for supporting one's parents. Debts are obligations owed. Debts of debauchery are money borrowed for consorting with courtesans. Burdened by heavy debts, they sell off all ancestral property, so that sustenance for their parents is wholly cut off.

They pawn their wives' dowries for daily feasting and drinking, leaving their children's hearth long cold.

To pawn is to pledge goods for money. A dowry is the clothing and jewellery a wife brings at marriage. Drunk and sated day and night in brothels, they pawn away their whole dowry. The home hearth goes cold, no rice remains for cooking, and their children suffer cold and hunger.

When gold by the bedside is spent, retributive diseases plague them relentlessly.

By the bedside means beside one's pillow. "When gold by the bedside is spent" means one's money is all gone. Retributive diseases refer to syphilis, gonorrhoea contracted in brothels, or bringing up blood and consumption brought on by excessive licentiousness. These afflictions stay with the sufferer. Brought about by one's own misdeeds, they are called retributive diseases.

He collapses in the street; kinsfolk and friends pass by, holding their noses.

Given to licentiousness, he contracts poisonous sores and karmic ailments. Rejected and cast out by courtesans, he can no longer walk and collapses in the roadway. A foul stench hangs about him. Relatives and acquaintances passing by all hold their noses.

His life lingers but a moment; old friends grieve at the sight.

Life means human existence. To linger is to remain. A moment is less than one hour (half a traditional shichen). Old friends are long-standing kin and companions. To grieve means to feel sorrow. Though the lecher clings to life for a brief span, all who once knew him are filled with sadness.

He looks far back upon former days, too pained to turn and recall.

To look far back is to reminisce. The former days refer to earlier days. Being too pained means being unable to bear it. To turn and recall is to look back. As he thinks of the joy he once knew before his ruin, he cannot bear to revisit those memories.

Such a wretched end calls for no sighs of pity.

"Such" means "this kind of". A wretched end means one's final lot. "Calls for no" means there is no need for. This miserable fate is the lecher's just due; no compassion or lament is owed him.

As for skilled craftsmen, they too ought to abide by established rules.

Craftsmen are artisans and tradespeople, such as various industrial and technical workers. "Skilled" means "accomplished". "Established rules" refer to precepts and standards. One who has learned a trade ought to uphold the rules handed down by his master and must never yield to licentiousness.

Some disregard their master's teachings, arranging secret trysts for illicit lodging, and spurn their friends' warnings, craving clandestine pleasure beneath the moon.

Master's teachings are the precepts against licentiousness given by one's trade instructor. To disregard is to disobey. Arranging secret trysts means making clandestine plans to meet another's woman at an inn for illicit congress. He pays no heed to friends who warn him against lechery, yet pursues secret moonlight rendezvous with other women.

No matter how fair and delicate the maiden, none escape the iron net. Regardless of her blossom-like face and moon-bright beauty, the gilded hook lies in wait.

A fair maiden is a comely young woman. Delicate ladies are tender wives. Blossom-like features are faces as lovely as flowers; moon-bright beauty is complexions pale and radiant as moonlight. An iron net traps beasts so they cannot flee. A gilded hook catches fish and turtles so they cannot escape. Many chaste women are

ensnared by libertines' schemes or tempted with money. Some fall into these traps, are defiled, and lose their good name. To think on this fills one with righteous indignation.

Young wives, overcome by shame, resolve to hang themselves in despair; defiled beauties choose to cast themselves into rivers out of humiliation.

Young married women are young wives. Powder-faced maidens are beauties. Once defiled and dishonored, they cannot bear to face the world and often hang themselves or drown themselves to escape public scorn.

Bitter resentment unappeased, they pour out their grief at the ghost-gate. Wronged souls unvanquished, they carry their plaint before the netherworld courts.

To pour forth tears and grievances is to weep while laying one's complaint. To file a plaint is to submit a formal accusation. The Ghost-Gate is the gateway to the realm of the dead. The netherworld is the tribunal of Yama Kings. When a woman, dishonored and shamed, dies with unappeased grief, her pent-up injustice turns into bitter wrath. She may become a vengeful ghost bent on seizing her defiler to avenge her wrong. Unless she weeps her plea at the Ghost-Gate and lodges her suit before the netherworld, begging the King of Hell to grant her retribution, how can her fury abate? How can her grievance ever be redressed? Such aggrieved ghosts may bring their violators to hang themselves, or strike them down so blood gushes from every orifice. Accounts of such cases abound in strange anecdotes of imperial examinations through the ages.

The Fifth Hall of Yama King holds stern justice, which brooks no delay.

The Fifth Hall is the fifth tribunal of the underworld. "Stern justice" alludes to the unyielding laws of Yama King. When those guilty of lechery fall into the nether realm, the King of Hell rebukes them for the sin of licentiousness, the worst of all vices. He shows no favoritism and grants not a moment's reprieve.

Brass hammers and iron guillotines rend flesh and blood streaming; sword trees and blade mountains leave bodies and souls shattered.

Bodies are battered to pulp with bronze hammers and sliced apart by iron guillotines — flesh and blood must gush and scatter without end. Sinners may further be cast upon sword-lined trees and hurled onto mountains of blades. Their mortal forms scatter across hell, and their souls sink into the sea of suffering. Such is the fate of those given to lust and licentiousness; truly a pitiable end!

One wrong fleeting idea brings irredeemable guilt.

To be wrongful is to be erroneous. To redeem is to buy back or atone for wrongs. “Lifelong” means spanning one’s whole earthly existence. This speaks of how a single misguided thought that gives rise to lecherous conduct brings about lifelong guilt that cannot be atoned for, dooming the sinner to hellish retribution.

What anguish must such a wretch endure!

Such a wretch refers to the lecherous man. At this hour, how can such a libertine bear his torment? How can his heart turn to true remorse?

Most blameworthy are merchants trading across rivers and lakes, who squander gold like dirt.

Trading means doing business. This passage speaks of the most blameworthy sort: merchants travelling across rivers and lakes, who indulge in lechery and consort with courtesans, squandering gold and silver as though they were filth.

They dally with courtesans to indulge passion, heedless of the watch bells and the waning night;

“Courtesans” means women who sell sexual services. They take courtesans in their arms, drinking and laughing to stir up amorous passion, caring nothing for how long or short the night may be.

They cling to sensual delights of wind-swept blossoms, oblivious to the setting moon and the crows’ dawn cry.

To cling means to covet and refuse to let go. Wind-swept blossoms, swaying charmingly, arouse lustful desires. The setting moon and crows' cawing foretell the coming of dawn. This describes men who wallow in romantic indulgence, taking delight in mortal women. They fail to perceive the break of day and still refuse to depart.

Long parted from their hometowns, they rarely send fish-scrolled letters; dwelling far away, they seldom dispatch messages tied to geese's feet to their kin.

Fish-scrolled letters refer to an ancient practice of concealing messages inside fish bellies. Wild-goose dispatches allude to the story of Su Wu of the Han Dynasty, in which family letters were tied to geese's feet for delivery home. This line describes merchants trading in distant lands who, infatuated with courtesans, lose track of time and seldom send word to their families.

With their pre-heaven kidney water ruined, medicines avail them nothing once taken. Repenting only after sickness sets in, they find their prayers to the gods fall on deaf ears.

Pre-heaven kidney water refers to human vital essence. The innate kidney-water essence, depleted by lechery and lust, brings about haggard features and incurable illness. Medicines produce no effect. Repentance comes only at this late hour; even prayers and vows to the gods are in vain.

Now they weep toward the distant horizon — who will give them a glance of care?!

Distant horizon means far-off lands at the edge of heaven. To give a glance of care means to visit and show concern. This describes one stricken by illness: though they weep facing the far horizon, there is no one to come and look after them.

After death they become ghosts of alien lands, souls remaining in foreign climes.

Having died in a strange land far from home, their ghosts and souls linger there for a long time without returning. Clime denotes place or land.

Across a thousand-li stretch of rivers and hills, who will pity his bleached bones? Beneath a mound of wild weeds, no kin or friends can be found to offer sacrifices.

When their skeletal remains are buried a thousand-li away from home, who will take pity on them and bring their bones back to his native soil? Their graves are covered only by tangled wild grass. No relatives or friends come to visit; there is no one to pity them, burn paper offerings, or keep cattle and horses from trampling their tombs. “To seek” means to look for.

Karmic retribution stands manifest, not the slightest deviation from what is due.

Manifest means clear and plain. It tells that retribution is plainly evident, without the smallest error or discrepancy.

Here I give earnest exhortations, charging the four classes of common folk.

“I” refers to the Divine Sovereign. Earnest exhortations mean sincere and repeated counsel. Charging means instructing and admonishing. The four classes of common folk are scholars, farmers, artisans and merchants. The passage bids them reform their faults and turn toward goodness, and above all shun lechery.

If you truly can nurture your mind and nature and refrain from unchaste lust, then poetry and ritual shall be handed down in your household; granaries and chests shall brim with blessings; fame and fortune shall be attained; long life and abundant bliss shall be yours.

“Truly” means resolutely and genuinely. Nurture carries the sense of gradual permeation, as water soaks into things. It states: if one can cultivate one’s mind and nature through humaneness, righteousness and moral virtue, undazzled by carnal desire, one will naturally avoid the grave sin of illicit lust. Poetry, books, rites and music become the family legacy; descendants are taught to

study diligently and till the land hard. Thus granaries and store-chests fill to bring prosperity; one attains merit and renown and enjoys long life and good fortune. Long life means advanced years; abundant bliss means great blessings.

The lintel glows with radiance; verily this is a household of wealth and honor.

Lintel is the horizontal beam above a gateway. The phrase “glows with radiance” describes gilded inscribed boards shining splendidly, manifesting the bearing of a wealthy and noble household.

Your neighborhood is graced with glory; you prove worthy of being a pillar of the realm.

Neighborhood stands for the lanes and dwellings of kinsmen and neighbors. Pillar of the realm denotes high-ranking officials, likened to the supporting beams of a state. Such a person brings honor to every household in the locality. The phrase “prove worthy of” means to be well suited for such a station.

Auspicious herbs spring forth before the hall; orchids and cassia send forth their fragrant bloom.

The phrase “before the hall” means before the court steps. The term “auspicious herbs” refers to fragrant plants. The image of orchids and cassia filling the courtyard with sweet scent is a portent seen only in blessed, prosperous households.

Auspicious vapors rise beyond the gate; both toon-tree father-symbol and day-lily mother-symbol flourish in full vigour.

Auspicious vapours denote propitious cosmic energy. The flourishing toon-tree symbolises a living father; the luxuriant day-lily stands for a living mother. This depicts the blessing of both parents being alive, with auspicious aura lingering outside the household gate.

Trace back to the root cause: much of this blessing springs from self-restraint against lust.

To trace means to investigate. Upon investigating the origin of such blessings, much accrues to those who abstain from illicit lust; the source of their good fortune is self-evident.

Yet from antiquity onward, there has been no shortage of men given to lechery.

This observes that throughout history many have yielded to lust and carnal desire.

King Jie of Xia abandoned Dao; enamored by Mo Xi, he brought ruin to his realm. King Zhou of Shang lacked humaneness; infatuated with Da Ji, he laid waste to the state.

Jie was the last king of the Xia Dynasty; Mo Xi was his royal courtesan. Zhou was the last king of the Shang Dynasty; Da Ji was his royal mistress. Realm and state are alternative terms for the empire. Both Jie and Zhou lost their kingdoms because they fell enslaved by feminine charms.

Duke Zhuang of Qi lost his life over Tang Jiang; his fate was unspeakably wretched. Duke Ling of Chen perished for the Xia clan woman; the scandal was too foul to recount.

Duke Zhuang was ruler of Qi; Tang Jiang was the widow of minister Tang Gong. He was assassinated for his illicit affair with her. Duke Ling reigned over Chen; the Xia-clan woman was the mother of minister Xia Zhengshu. He was slain on account of his liaison with her. Their ends were miserable, and the infamy too shameful to dwell upon.

As for such episodes recounted in New Terrace, Thorns on the Wall, and the verses of Pu-shang and Sang-jian: whoever reads those poems cannot but brand such men as beasts.

New Terrace from the Odes of Bei satirized Duke Xuan of Wei for taking his son's bride for himself. *Thorns on the Wall* from the Odes of Yong censored Prince Wan for committing incest with the queen-mother. Sang-jian beside the Pu River in Wei was a place notorious for licentious customs devoid of propriety. Readers of these verses universally condemn such conduct as no better than that of brute beasts.

Such bygone deeds are worthy of reflection; vice once ran to such terrible extremes.

Bygone deeds refer to the stories of King Jie, King Zhou, the dukes of Qi and Chen recounted above. One may well look back and ponder how lechery drove men to behave like beasts.

Moreover, when I served the House of Han, every fibre of my heart might stand laid bare.

The Divine Sovereign speaks of his service as a Han subject, wholly devoted to upholding the Han dynasty. Every thought of his may be openly shown to all under heaven.

I held a candle and waited for dawn; I harbored no compliance toward Cao Cao.

Dawn means daybreak. The Ruler recounts how he once escorted the imperial sisters-in-law and was detained by Cao Cao's troops. Cao Cao sought to drive a wedge between lord and vassal, locking him and the imperial sisters-in-law inside one chamber, hoping to tempt incest and make him betray his sworn lord. Refusing to sleep, he kept a candle burning, sat reading the Spring and Autumn Annals, and waited for sunrise. He would not fall for Cao Cao's treacherous ploy, for he would never submit to him.

I slew enemy generals and forced passes open, to seek my elder brother and safeguard the imperial sisters-in-law.

After leaving Cao Cao's camp, he crossed five passes, slew six opposing generals, and escorted the imperial sisters-in-law to rejoin his sworn elder brother. This displays his single-minded loyalty to the Han house.

Liuxia Hui remained unperturbed even with a woman sitting in his lap. What noble purity! Lu Zhonglian barred his gate and would not give shelter. What lofty integrity!

Liuxia Hui was a sage of the Warring-States era. Once a woman sought refuge and sat in his embrace, yet his heart stayed free of improper desire; his purity was peerless. Lu Zhonglian was a worthy man of the same age. When a woman sought shelter from

night rain and a leaking roof, he shut his door and would not admit her; his moral fortitude was beyond compare.

I exhort all gifted young men to guard their dantian well.

Gifted young men mean talented, promising youths. Many such young men shorten their lives through lust. Hence the Divine Sovereign urges them to preserve their elixir-field to nourish vital spirit. The elixir-field is the vital-energy reservoir roughly one cun below the navel.

May they remain unharmed by carnal desire, thus attaining the ages of mao-die; may they not be misled by skirt and hairpin adornments, their virtues descending upon their sons and grandsons.

Carnal desire refers to lustful cravings. The ancients held that many things harm one's vitality, yet indulgence in lust necessarily harms the body. If one keeps free from injuries wrought by carnal desire, he may well live to eighty, ninety or even a full century, enjoying a ripe old age. Eighty years of age is defined as mao, and ninety as die; both denote advanced longevity. Skirt and hairpin adornments symbolize beautiful women. To be misled means men fall prey to sensual temptation and commit grave misdeeds, leading to the decline of their descendants. If a man resists the allure of women, he accumulates profound hidden virtue, which will surely benefit his posterity and bring prosperity to generations to come.

Upon entering, one hears no widows' grief; lives are long-lasting like heaven and earth. Upon going forth, one sees no widowers' misery; people are white-haired yet youthful-faced.

If people do not harm themselves through lust, both men and women shall enjoy great longevity, enduring as heaven and earth. Naturally, when one enters their households, no sorrow-stricken widows are to be heard. Likewise, when the men go out, no wretched widowers are to be seen. Those who attain great old age have hair as white as a crane's feathers — hence "crane-white

hair". Yet their complexions remain ruddy, like a child's countenance — hence "youthful looks".

Within the household prevails perfect harmony; one knows not the approach of old age.

"Within the household" means the whole family. In such a home, men and women are free of illness and pain, blessed with fortune and long life. All feel the auspicious power of concord; the elders live in peace and comfort, so they scarcely perceive that old age is drawing near.

None knows a disciple better than his teacher; none knows a son better than his father.

Here "disciple" refers to a student, and "teacher" to an instructor. Only a teacher truly understands a student's temperament; only a father clearly knows his son's inclinations.

I have seen those who serve as teachers never, apart from teaching book-learning, impart the wisdom of self-preservation.

The wisdom of self-preservation means guarding one's vital essence and not being ensnared by carnal desires. I have observed teachers who, apart from instructing their pupils in reading, fail to teach them to curb lust and protect their bodies. This is truly lamentable.

Some, because their pupils are clever, allow them to grow frivolous and unrestrained.

"Frivolous and unrestrained" describes impetuous youth: arrogant and conceited, still ridden with superficial impulses. Such students ought to be earnestly exhorted to cultivate gravity and steadiness. Yet because they are bright and quick-witted, teachers indulge them instead of instructing, letting them act recklessly without restraint.

Some, yielding to the household head's fond partiality, allow the youth to chase pleasure like butterflies and bees running wild.

The “household head” is the pupil’s parent. “Fond partiality” means shielding one’s child from reproach. Butterflies darting and bees swarming among blossoms are a metaphor for young men frequenting places of debauchery. Because parents dote on their sons, they permit such reckless lechery and refuse to discipline them in earnest.

When sensual desires first awaken, innate conscience fades little by little. “The opening of desire” is described as an aperture through which sensual desire arises.

“When sensual desires first awaken” refers to the stirring of lustful thoughts upon being tempted. Once lascivious desires take root, one disregards ruining others’ reputations, commits adultery with others’ wives and daughters, and loses one’s heaven-endowed moral conscience.

One who ought to be a scholar-official is turned into a dissolute libertine.

“Jade Hall” denotes the Hanlin Academy’s official premises; “the scholar-official” refers here to its learned officials. “Dissolute” denotes lewd and depraved conduct. It speaks of promising young men endowed with the potential to become distinguished scholars. Yet, overcome by lust, they ruin their own prospects and end their days as pleasure-seeking profligates.

Even those of upright and extraordinary talent shall assuredly meet frustration in their official careers.

“Upright and extraordinary” means open-minded and outstanding. “Extraordinary talent” denotes remarkable intellectual gifts. “Meet frustration” means suffering repeated setbacks and thwarted endeavors. Though a youth may possess exceptional talent, if he falls into sexual misconduct, his career and official advancement will surely be thwarted.

Such is the fault of mediocre teachers; the harm they inflict runs deep.

“Mediocre” means commonplace and unrefined. Vulgar teachers fail to pass on the wisdom of self-preservation to their

pupils, allowing them to indulge in lust and ruin their prospects. This is the fault of mediocre teachers, and the harm they bring to others is far from trivial.

I have also seen fathers who indulge their children blindly and are slow to administer reproof.

Blind indulgence means excessive leniency. “Slow” means dilatory and remiss. “Reproof” includes admonition and correction. The Divine Sovereign says that many fathers lack clear-sighted judgment. They spoil their children; when misdeeds call for correction, they delay and withhold discipline. Is this not blind indulgence?

At the slightest smattering of knowledge, they tell everyone they meet that their sons are fine boys. For trivial skills or small merits, they go about loudly boasting of their worthy sons.

“A smattering of knowledge” means only partial understanding. “Trivial skills” are modest abilities; “small merits” mean minor strengths. “Fine boys” and “worthy sons” both speak of excellent children. Even for minor accomplishments of their sons, such fathers go about praising them to others, eager to show off their fine offspring.

Though the son is no instrument for establishing a household, he is treasured as a jewel upon the feast mat.

An “instrument” here means a vessel fit for use. A “jewel upon the feast-mat” stands for pearls and fine jade laid out at feasts. It means the son is in truth unfit to sustain and build a family, yet the father treats him like a precious gem, indulging and sparing him from discipline.

Thence they cast off restraints, transgress bounds, violate rites and overstep their proper station.

Restraints refer to supervision over young people’s behaviors. Bounds mean the safeguards set to prevent youngsters from committing faults. Rites stand for rituals that distinguish male and female, inner private quarters and outer public spheres. Proper

station refers to status defined by ethical principles and interpersonal moral order. The four verbs: cast off, transgress, violate and overstep, all signify acting in defiance of rules and proprieties.

They contract a frivolous disposition, recklessly seeking carnal rest with nuns and widows.

A nun is a woman who has left household life to enter the Buddhist monastic order. A widow is a woman bereaved of her husband. This means the spoiled youths become steeped in flippant, reckless habits, and willfully seduce nuns and widows, craving the pleasure of lying with them.

They put on a show of muddled speech, and indulge every whim of their hearts in pleasure quarters.

Such libertines feign foolishness, uttering confused, nonsensical words, and roam freely through streets of debauchery, following whatever delights their fancy.

"**My father teaches me to walk in rectitude, yet my father himself does not follow the upright path**."

Here "father" denotes his own sire. Rectitude means the righteous way. "Does not follow the upright path" means failing to conduct oneself morally. Though his father instructs him to do what is right, the son retorts that his father is no example of rectitude, and refuses all admonishment.

His father swallows his anger in silence. What end can there be to this?

An "end" here signifies a way out of the predicament. The father has long spoiled his child, shielding his faults at every turn and warping the son's temperament. Now when he tries to guide him onto the right path, he is met with insolent pushback. He can only choke back his rage. How shall he extricate himself from such a plight!

I reflect upon famed mountains and great rivers — where are there no men of profound wisdom?

Famed mountains are celebrated peaks; great rivers are mighty watercourses. The Divine Sovereign means that throughout these lands, there are surely many persons of discerning insight.

Yet when the conversation turns to restraining lust, few do not deem it a hardship. Why is this?

When speaking of curbing sensual desire, most people regard it as difficult; very few see it otherwise. What is the underlying cause?

For the steed of intention is hard to tether, long entangled by worldly karmic ties; the ape of the mind remains unlocked, fettered by the realm of sensual allure.

"The steed of intention and the ape of the mind" are metaphors for wandering, unruly thoughts: like a horse galloping free that cannot be reined in, like a monkey leaping wild that cannot be confined. Mostly, people have long been snared by worldly karmic bonds and trapped by sensual temptations; hence they find reformation so hard.

They cannot distinguish harm from benefit, and cling stubbornly to delusion.

Before retribution descends upon the lustful, they fail to tell peril from profit and behave recklessly. Once lost in delusion, even when given warning, they cling to their misguided ways and refuse to awaken.

Know this: hibiscus-fair faces have ensnared countless heroes; behold, gorgeously adorned beauties have wounded numberless valiant men.

"Hibiscus-fair faces" describes women whose complexions are as lovely as hibiscus blossoms. "Gorgeously adorned beauties" are women made radiant with rouge and powder. Heroes and valiant men are people of great talent. Innumerable such persons have ruined their futures, trapped and harmed by worldly beauty — their number is legion under heaven.

Beware, beware! If lust is not curbed, when shall calamity ever cease!

“Beware, beware” reveals an urgent exhortation: one must resolutely curb lust. If one transgresses and yields to it, when will the disasters and misfortunes it brings ever come to an end?

All under heaven teems with mankind, and human stations and kinds are diverse.

The world holds countless people, and their social ranks and dispositions are not all alike.

Some are orphaned in youth, bereft of paternal care, and so shave their heads to become monks.

“Bereft of paternal care” means deprived of one’s support. To lose one’s father in childhood is to be orphaned. Having no one to rely on, such youths shave their heads and enter temples as monks, placing their trust in divine protection.

Some seek Dao amid famed mountains, parting from the mortal world and casting off worldly customs.

Others see through mortal vanity and refuse to dwell among ordinary folk. They repair to famous mountains to cultivate Dao, seeking longevity through spiritual practice.

They ought to have hearts firm as iron and stone, firmly closing the gates of their monastic seclusion.

Being monks or Daoist priests, they ought to possess minds as unyielding as iron and stone, keeping the gates of their monastic quarters tightly shut, not associating with women.

Yet unexpectedly, they drink wine and eat meat, privately breaking the fasts and abstinences they once observed.

Monks and priests attach great weight to ritual fasting; wine and meat are forbidden. That they should break these observances comes as a surprise, which is hard for people to comprehend.

They indulge in illicit carnal unions, reversing luan and feng, chasing nothing but fleeting earthly gratification.

The phoenix-like luan and feng birds mate only with their proper counterparts, symbolizing chaste marital fidelity. Yet licentious monks and priests seduce virtuous women, plotting

against husbands or eloping with them, engaging in disorderly unions. They pursue nothing but momentary pleasure for their own hearts.

They defile the lotus pond, stirring the wrath of heavenly gods.

The lotus pond within a temple is a place of purity. When monks or priests commit sexual misdeeds there, they pollute this sacred ground. How could the heavenly gods not grow angered?

They are cast into the karmic sea of suffering, doomed to remain submergedfor a long time.

The karmic sea of suffering denotes the bitter karmic abyss. “Yong” here means a long time; to fall means to descend, and to sink means to be submerged. Having defiled the pure lotus pond, such wrongdoers shall be hurled by the heavenly gods into the karmic abyss, submerged for a long time without attaining release.

Before the gates of hell, there are many Buddhist monks and Daoist priests. Is this an empty saying? How could this not be true?

Hell is the prison of the netherworld. The old saying holds that many of those who suffer punishment at hell’s gates are Buddhist monks and Daoist priests. This phrase here refers to religious practitioners and spiritual cultivators. These are no idle words, and the truth of this warning is plain to see.

In recent times, foreign customs and new fashions have invaded the Middle Kingdom.

The phrase “In recent times” means recent years. Foreign customs refer to frivolous foreign Western mores, and new fashions denote popular novel trends. The word “invaded” means encroaching and eroding. The term “The Middle Kingdom” stands for China. It means that frivolous, dissolute foreign customs have spread into China, bringing great harm to society.

Men and women alter their bearing; their attire is grotesque, and they cast aside all sense of shame and honor.

To alter their bearing means to change one's inherent demeanor. Grotesque attire refers to outlandish and inappropriate clothing. It means men and women forsake their original honest, chaste dispositions, dress in bizarre outfits devoid of propriety, and abandon all feelings of shame.

Some dress in revealing attire to flaunt themselves in public, indulging in disorderly love and sowing karmic evil, losing chastity before marriage.

"Flaunt" means parading oneself impudently in public. Disorderly love denotes improper romantic entanglements and casual illicit relationships. Sowing karmic evil means to plant the seeds of bad karma — such as premarital conception or forbidden liaisons across social bounds, which bring endless misfortune. Losing chastity means to lose one's sexual purity. This speaks of those who wear revealing garments to display their bodies, pursue unregulated romance, and enter into improper relations before wedlock, forfeiting their chaste innocence.

Others play all manner of trades, deploying countless strange and crafty stratagems.

All manner of trades means all kinds of occupations. To deploy signifies to contrive. Countless strange and whimsical phenomena manifest in a myriad of bizarre forms. Stratagems refer to dazzling deceptive devices. It tells that many modern-day persons engage in diverse callings, yet earn wealth through crooked means. They resort to deceptive tricks — hanging a sheep's head while selling dog's flesh. Their shop-fronts appear bright and reputable, yet behind closed doors they operate disguised lewd enterprises, utterly base.

Openly they display bewitching charms and coquettish allure; secretly they conceal confusing vortices that incite lechery. Numerous resolute-minded men sink into these snares; countless students wander there, forgetting to depart.

Bewitching charms are beguiling smiles. Coquettish allure means seductive glances. To incite lechery is to arouse licentious

desire. These disguised dens of vice present colorful exteriors filled with alluring women who exhibit coquettish graces and seek to draw men into destructive swirling eddies. Hidden within are snares provoking sexual misconduct, inflicting great harm. Numerous promising, resolute-spirited men are ruined therein. Multitudes of young students are lured to linger in dissolute quarters, neglecting their studies; indulging in lust, they are also gravely unfilial.

All manner of trades are permissible to pursue, yet the karmic sins of lecherous businesses they choose are profound. Wrongdoers endure cruel torments in Avīci Hell, their descendants laden with retribution and enduring perpetual infamy.

All manner of trades refers to every form of legitimate commerce. Lecherous businesses denote enterprises profiting from sexual debauchery. While people may take up any lawful occupation, operating bawdy establishments incurs heavy karmic sin. Transgressors face brutal torment within Avīci Hell in the afterlife. Their descendants also suffer karmic retribution. Should anyone ask about their ancestors' livelihoods, admitting they ran brothels will bring towering infamy and shame lasting through eternity.

Do not say that lingering in pleasure-houses to rapture the soul brings delight in seeking gratification.

Lingering means unrestrained tarrying. To rapture the soul is to be spiritually bewitched. Seeking gratification is chasing sensual thrills. Let none imagine that abandoning restraint, being ensnared by feminine charms and hunting for pleasure are something to boast of.

Though transactions are made with silver and coin, their spiritual nature cannot escape defilement. Though no eyes behold it as witness, within the dark chamber the heart itself feels remorse.

Transactions denote buying and selling. Spiritual nature refers to the original nature of one's soul. Defilement means moral stain. The dark chamber signifies secret privacy. Even when sensual indulgence is purchased with money, one's inmost spirit is stained. Though no onlookers are present, deep within secrecy the conscience feels guilt and shame.

Once depraved thoughts arise, evil notions spring forth. Their personal and household purity is forfeited, and baneful seedlings take root within their mind field.

Depraved thoughts are unrighteous ideations. To spring forth means to multiply and grow. Person and household stand for oneself and one's family. The field of the mind is the inner heart and spiritual consciousness. Poisonous seedlings are karmic seeds of sin. When lustful musings awaken, vicious impulses proliferate. Reason fades, and incestuous and dishonorable acts may follow. One's own person and family lose their good repute. Toxic karmic seeds take root, even passing baleful influences to later generations.

Karmic transgressions for ten thousand generations cling henceforth; countless transmigrations through successive aeons know no repose.

Ten thousand generations means lifetime after lifetime. To cling means to adhere and never release. Successive aeons are vast cycles of cosmic calamity. Sins persistently follow the soul across countless lives. Through cycle upon cycle of existence, retribution recurs without end. What a terrible fate!

Fortunately, one has strayed but a short way from the true path, discerning present rectitude and past faults.

Blessedly, having wandered astray only a short distance, one awakens to realize that former deeds were wrong and resolves to abide by the righteous path henceforth.

Those who aspire to sagehood shall grudge no sacrifice to amend their faults.

To grudge means to be miserly or slothful. Sages teach that amending one's faults comes first. He who is neither miserly nor slothful in reforming himself is one who aspires to sagehood.

Thus, sins as vast as the heavens can be dissolved by a single act of repentance.

To be as vast as the heavens means to be immeasurably great. Even crimes as immense as heaven itself may be erased through sincere repentance and renewal.

Should those shrink from the hardship of reformation and seek idle ease, karmic guilt deepens day by day. Though they have tasted lust and refuse to let go, repentance is put off from this year unto the next.

If one finds amendment too difficult and pursues complacent comfort, his karmic sins will grow graver with each passing day. Even knowing lust brings no true satisfaction, he will not abandon it. When urged to repent without delay in the present year, he defers the task to the year ahead.

Those given to lust suffer countless reverses yet refuse to repent, their cravings undimmed. Not until the coffin-lid closes upon them for eternity shall their misdeeds cease.

People obsessed with carnal lust will not turn back even amid repeated adversities. So long as their physical life remains, they persist in sensual craving. They desist only when death encloses them in the coffin. The coffin-lid closing upon them for eternity signifies final death, with no return to mortal life.

Evil names pass down through eternity, becoming tales told across all ages.

Evil names are disreputable reputations. Tales told are material for gossip. Infamy spreads far and wide, enduring through millennia.

Wicked deeds cannot be concealed, spreading far and wide as infamous anecdotes.

Wicked deeds are acts of lechery and vice. "Cannot be concealed" means "cannot be hidden". People in all quarters

speak of these shameful misdeeds, recounting them as scandalous tales.

If one's sons bear no likeness to the virtuous, it would be better to have no posterity at all.

It refers to a son devoid of his father's virtues, given over to lust and debauchery, who brings disgrace upon the ancestral name and unending affliction to his lineage. It would be better to have no such child, for one would feel a sense of relief instead.

Rivers may shift their courses, yet inborn nature is hard to transform.

Inborn nature refers to innate disposition. Being hard to transform means being difficult to alter. Even rivers can change their channels, but deep-rooted evil dispositions resist change.

Wine of itself does not inebriate man; man inebriates himself. Lust of itself does not beguile man; man beguiles himself.

Wine remaining in a pot cannot make anyone drunk; men get drunk through their own fondness for drink. Other women do not come to bewitch men; men ensnare themselves by yielding to lust and seeking out seduction.

I manifest to deliver counsel, hoping you will cast off old vices and reestablish your virtue.

The Divine Sovereign states: I manifest to impart teaching, desiring that all people abandon licentious habits, renew their moral character, and become renewed persons.

If you follow these sacred precepts in practice, I shall grant you the five blessings of the Ji-chou Canon.

The Divine Sovereign states: If anyone abides by this scripture's precepts personally or teaches others with it, I shall safeguard him to enjoy the Five Blessings of Ji Chou. Ji Chou refers to the Nine Domains of Hongfan (The Great Plan) expounded by Viscount Ji. The Five Blessings are: first, longevity; second, affluence; third, health and tranquility; fourth, delight in virtue; fifth, a ripe old age with a peaceful passing.

If you abide unswervingly, without straying or digressing, I shall bestow upon you the Three Abundances of benediction.

Straying means deviating; digressing means wandering afar. To keep the scripture faithfully without straying, or not to abandon it but to read it every morning and evening, wins the Three Abundances: abundant blessings, abundant years, abundant sons — the ancient benediction spoken to Emperor Yao by the Huafeng elder.

If you guard your body like flawless fine jade, you shall surely be received and led upward to the Heavenly Terrace.

Fine jade denotes superior jade; flawless means free of blemishes and flaws. The Heavenly Terrace is the abode of immortals. The passage teaches: if men and women in the world refrain from licentious conduct, they are like unblemished fine jade. When their merits and virtues are fully accomplished, immortals and Buddhas shall receive and guide them to ascend to the Realm of Ultimate Bliss.

If you keep yourself pure and upright, you shall be greeted by the kings of the netherworld upon your passing.

To be pure and upright is to be untainted like clear water. It means inwardly cherishing goodness and rejecting evil. This verse conveys that when such people die and arrive in the netherworld, the Yama kings of every hall will rise from their seats to greet them.

Their entire household shall be spared from calamities of flood, fire, warfare and weapons. Scourges of insects, locusts and pestilence shall all be dispelled unseen.

To vanish unseen means to be eliminated secretly. Those who observe and practice this scripture shall be spared all calamities of flood, fire and warfare; scourges of insects, locusts and pestilence will likewise be dispelled completely.

Look back upon those lecherous libertines, now blind and deaf; surely they bore heavy karmic sins in their past lives.

To look back is to turn one's gaze and behold others. Libertines refer to reckless folk given to lustful indulgence. Sins mean karmic transgressions. Past lives denote former incarnations. One who cannot see is blind, and one who cannot hear is deaf. This saying states that such people suffer blindness and deafness in this present life as retribution for grave misdeeds committed in their past lives.

Lame feet and severed hands — these stem from deep-seated karmic grievances of former lifetimes.

This means deep-rooted karmic debts from past incarnations cause one to be disabled in the present life.

Dwelling in dismal cold temples, they lack clothing and food; living in dilapidated kilns, they endure hunger and bitter cold.

Nor is this all. Licentious people are left without a settled home and cannot sustain their daily livelihood. They can only take refuge in cold deserted temples and huddle within crumbling kilns, suffering endless hardship. Are these not the karmic fruits of licentious deeds in past lives?

Reduced to utter destitution, what avenue is left for the sinner to repent?

Utter destitution means sinking into extreme poverty. "Unable to live on" means having no means to sustain life. Repentance means confessing one's sins and atoning for one's transgressions. Having reached such a plight, one bears retribution for one's own past deeds or ancestral karmic legacy. One wishes to reform yet cannot — where is there room for repentance?

You who grow up in the Central Realm must not behave like barbarian peoples.

"You" refers to you all. The Central Realm stands for China, while barbarian peoples denote groups ignorant of morality and ethics. Since you are born and raised in the Central Realm, do not act like peoples of uncivilized lands who know nothing of ritual and righteousness.

Why not take these as a mirror, return to simpleness and restore trueness?!

A mirror serves as a warning example. Simpleness is native simplicity. Trueness is the genuine upright Way. Why do you not take these wretched fates as your warning mirror, turn back to native simplicity and abide by the true Way?

This scripture is like medicinal stones, and ought likewise to be held as the measuring line.

Medicinal stones refer to substances that cure illness. A measuring line is the craftsman's tool for gauging straightness. This statement teaches that every line within the Scripture on Abstaining from Licentiousness is a profound maxim, which can cure people of the mental malady of lechery, just like an upright measuring line.

Every word of this scripture is a gem. How can it be set high on a shelf and neglected?!

Gems are precious treasures such as pearls and agates. To be set high on a shelf means to be put aside and neglected. A high shelf denotes a lofty, unused upper chamber. The line says every word of this scripture is as precious as gems, benefiting one's body and mind. How could one dismiss it as useless, storing it away in an empty loft without reciting it aloud and contemplating it in the mind?

Though I am devoid of talent, I descend to the altar to deliver admonitions and awaken deluded beings.

To deliver means to leave behind. The Divine Sovereign says: "Though I possess no great learning, I come to the spirit-altar to leave these admonitions. My sole purpose through these good words is to rouse those deluded by carnal allurements, that they may turn back without delay."

If there are people who keep this scripture close at hand and cherish it wholeheartedly, I shall bestow greater blessings and lengthen their years.

To keep upon one's person means to carry it on one's body. To cherish whole-heartedly means to keep it firmly in one's mind. It means that if someone carries the Scripture on Restraining Licentiousness with them and holds it constantly in their minds, I shall protect them, augment their blessings and wisdom, and extend their allotted lifespan.

If there are people who expound this scripture aloud and point to its text for others, I shall blot out their sins and cancel their transgressions.

If you explain this scripture for others, pointing to its passages for them to see, then the licentious misdeeds, sins and karmic grievances committed by you in the past shall be blotted clean from the karmic registers. All faults shall vanish completely, opening a path for renewal.

If people do not regard my words as idle talk, I shall be grateful for their regard within the Lingxiao Hall.

Idle talk means groundless hearsay. Lingxiao Hall is the palace where the Divine Sovereign dwells. The Divine Sovereign states: if you do not take my admonitions in this scripture as unfounded chatter, I shall hold your attitude in appreciation within the Lingxiao Hall.

If people do not take my words as perverse doctrine, I shall mend their faults for them within the Golden Palace.

Perverse doctrine stands for improper teachings. The Golden Palace is the abode of the Supreme Deity. To mend faults means to remedy one's misdeeds. If people do not dismiss my scripture as false teaching, then — because human hearts are corrupt, the Supreme Deity repeatedly sends calamities — I shall intercede and mend your transgressions from the Golden Palace, lessening and even eliminating the disasters that befall you.

Should the purport of this scripture lack thoroughness and precision, I shall look to learned talents to revise and correct it.

This means that where the ideas set forth in the Scripture on Abstaining from Licentiousness are not subtle or clear enough, I hope persons of erudition will proofread and amend it, so that it may attain complete perfection.

If its wording is not wholly refined, I further beseech renowned scholars to offer their critique.

Wording refers to the phrasing and diction of the text. Where the language is not entirely polished and elegant, I earnestly beg celebrated literati both near and far to point out its flaws and make revisions, likewise bringing the work to full perfection.

Alas, all you people of the world! You burn incense morning and evening, and recite my Peach-Garden Scripture scroll. You pay homage at dawn and dusk, and read my sincere admonitory writings.

Morning denotes dawn, and evening denotes dusk. The Divine Sovereign observes that people in the world burn pure incense and perform reverent rites, reciting the Peach-Garden Scripture scroll and reading his admonitions written with sincere concern. Their aspiration toward goodness is indeed praiseworthy.

Since you honor me as a divine being, how could I fail to regard you as newborn infants?

A newborn infant constantly requires protection. Since mortals revere me as a divinity, how could I not protect you as though you were my own children?

Since you wish to escape the sea of suffering, you must sever evil demons.

The karmic retribution for licentious evil is exceedingly bitter, hence the “sea of suffering”. To escape means to get free. Demonic delusions describe the state in which one is obsessed with wine and lust, as if beset by evil souls. If you desire to flee the sea of suffering, you must cut off delusive demonic thoughts and no longer be ensnared by them.

Since you seek to cover up your former transgressions, you must eradicate your karmic hindrances.

Former transgressions refer to faults committed in past lives and in days gone by. To cover up means to conceal. Karmic hindrances are grave sins that act like barriers, obscuring one's good mind. To eradicate means to exterminate. The text means that if you wish to conceal all your past misdeeds, you must quickly curb licentious desire, accumulate many virtuous merits, and wipe away the karmic obstructions caused by your bygone wrongs.

If you spurn my exhortations, there is nothing more I can do.

The meaning is as follows: I have earnestly admonished you with kind words, yet you refuse to heed my counsel; what more can I do for you?

On Knife Mountain you shall roll; In the oil cauldron you shall boil; Upon the Blood River you shall sit; Molten iron you shall swallow.

When karmic retribution befalls, the King of the Underworld commands ghost enforcers to hurl you onto the Mountain of Knives, leaving you to tumble helplessly. You are cast into the boiling-oil cauldron to suffer scalding torment. You may be submerged in the River of Blood, afflicted by bitter cold and fetid stench. Molten iron may be poured down your throat, searing your viscera as though simmered in boiling oil — you shall endure every such agony.

At that hour, even should you seek to read my Scripture on Abstaining from Licentiousness, you shall hardly escape the pit of fire; even should you wish to read my Admonitions against Licentiousness, you shall scarcely gain entry to the Heavenly Court.

"At that hour" refers to the moment one endures torment in hell. "The pit of fire" stands for the sufferings upon the Mountain of Knives and within the Oil Cauldron. "You shall hardly escape the pit of fire" means deliverance will no longer be possible, even if one turns to the scripture at that late moment. "The Heavenly

Court" is the blessed realm reserved for souls without sin. "You shall scarcely gain entry to the Heavenly Court" signifies that reciting these admonitions when doom has fallen cannot bring spiritual transcendence.

I abide in the Azure Firmament, dreading lest you should harbor resentment toward me, while you writhe in hideous torment within the netherworld.

The Divine Sovereign means that you endure sundry cruel punishments in hell, and I, dwelling in the Hall of the Azure Firmament, fear you will blame me for not warning you sooner.

You long to escape but cannot flee; you long to go but cannot move. It is too late to amend your ways, and your regret is futile.

Once trapped in hellish suffering, you cannot slip away nor move from your place. When matters have come to this pass, amendment is impossible, and regret is of no avail.

Having endured every manner of agony, you are dispatched to be reborn as beasts. Clad in fur or bearing horns, you dwell among birds and brute creatures.

After suffering all forms of torture in hell, souls are sent forth to take animal birth: some grow fur, some sprout horns, consigned to live alongside fowls and wild beasts.

Still you perish beneath the blade, boiled in cauldrons or consumed by fire. When shall your karmic debt conclude, that you may regain a human body?

"Still" means once more. Even as beasts, you are slain by knives, boiled in pots or burned by flames. Not until your karmic account is settled may you be reborn in human form.

To forfeit the human body is a calamity spanning ten thousand kalpas. Far better to cultivate goodness and amass virtue, rising aloft to the celestial realms.

Should one know one's faults yet refuse reform and lose the precious human incarnation, one shall endure hardship through ten thousand cosmic eons, unable swiftly to regain a human body.

How much wiser to nurture goodness and build virtue, so as to ascend to the heavens among the clouds.

Let the wreck of the preceding cart be a warning to the cart that follows: this is the true elixir of ageless longevity.

"The preceding cart" is the cart travelling ahead. "Wreck" means it has crashed. "The cart that follows" is the one coming behind. "Warning" means exercising caution. The lesson: take those ruined by lust, who brought death and ruin upon their households, as your cautionary example, just as later carts take warning from an earlier wreck. Thus shall blessings and longevity increase, as though imbibing the divine elixir of immortality.

In days of old, spirit-writing manifested divine revelation, yet folk half-believed and half-doubted.

"In days of old" means in former times. In bygone days, spirit-writing altars were established, where divine messages descended through flying planchettes to enlighten mortals. Alas, people were divided between faith and scepticism: few believed, many doubted.

Hence catastrophes loom constantly; strife and warfare rage far and wide. Heaven and earth are turned upside down, bringing misfortunes upon millions of people.

"Catastrophes" refer to calamities such as floods, fires, pestilences and the like. To loom repeatedly means they keep coming. Moreover, wars bring turmoil to the whole world, turning heaven and earth upside down. Millions of people suffer from the ensuing misfortunes. What a pitiable sight!

With blazing lamps and candles, altars are raised everywhere to expound sacred teachings. Townsfolk and villagers rally eagerly; each community recites penitential liturgies and honors the sacred scriptures.

"Blazing" describes brilliant lamplight. "Raise altars" means setting up spirit-writing shrines. "Expound sacred teachings" means explaining moral and spiritual doctrines. Because disasters repeatedly descended, townsfolk and villagers alike gladly

contributed funds to erect ritual altars and perform sacred ceremonies, hoping to turn back the tide of calamity.

All this amounts to mending the pen after sheep have strayed, striving to win back Heaven's favor.

The establishing of altars and preaching of teachings seek solely to turn back the will of Heaven. It is like a shepherd mending his pen after sheep have escaped: doing all that human effort can accomplish.

I too spare no toil, preaching the Dharma to deliver mortals.

The Divine Sovereign says: I endure hardship without complaint, expounding scriptures, classics, rites and moral precepts, that worldly people may turn their hearts toward goodness and attain liberation.

Should any regard this scripture as an inconsequential text, calamities shall descend forthwith.

"Inconsequential" means merely filling a place, of no real import. It speaks of those who dismiss this Scripture on Abstaining from Licentiousness as trivial and dissuade others from believing and abiding by it. For such persons, disasters and misfortunes shall come all at once without delay, as a warning against their reckless folly.

Should any pronounce this Scripture absurd and groundless, they shall instantly be torn asunder by thunder-bolt.

"Absurd and groundless" means lacking all factual basis. If one denounces this Scripture on Abstaining from Licentiousness as baseless nonsense, sowing doubt to turn others away from faith, thunder and lightning shall immediately strike, rending their bodies to pieces as retribution for their wickedness.

Such is a mother-heart of tender compassion, to which the Eight Immortals clasp their hands in salute. Such is a bosom brimming with ardent zeal, for which the Five Elders lift their heads in admiration.

"A mother's heart of tender compassion" refers to the Divine Sovereign's sincere, loving concern for mankind, like a mother caring for her children. "The Eight Immortals" are the Daoist immortals of the Eight Caves, who clasp their hands to show their approval. "Ardent zeal" stands for the Divine Sovereign's whole-hearted devotion to saving the world. "The Five Elders" refer to the Five Elders of Youhe, ancient exalted divine beings, who lift their heads in praise of this noble teaching.

I grudge not its plain simplicity, to lay it open before all mortal beings.

"Cangsheng", literally the black-haired people, denotes the common people. The Divine Sovereign declares: I do not shrink from the plain, unrefined nature of this admonition, making it known far and wide to all people, earnestly hoping to turn them away from licentious transgression.

Commit it to jujube-and-chestnut-wood printing blocks; herein lies my earnest hope.

Jujube and chestnut wood were traditionally used for carving printing blocks. The Divine Sovereign says: having set forth this Scripture on Abstaining from Licentiousness for all mankind, I urge you to have it carved onto woodblocks, printed and circulated to admonish the world. This is my sincere and fervent wish, that all people may speedily put its teachings into practice.

A Poem Against Licentiousness

You seek the path of death of your own free will, You boast of deep love, yet deeper grows the karmic wrong. View alluring beauty as you would demons; Deceive no gods or ghosts with lustful thought sown.

What joy abides in fleeting amorous dream? Hell's stern decrees bring woe no soul can bear. Ask those who stain another's spouse and dame: Would they their own dear kin endure the shame?

Appendix VIII Precious Admonition on Abstaining from Licentiousness by the Divine Sovereign Wenchang

By command of the Supreme Honored One of the Golden Palace, on the yin and mao days of each month, I make a circuit of Fengdu Hell to examine and verify the deeds of guilty people under heaven. I behold the black registers piled mountain-high, each volume recording the karmic record of a mortal's whole lifetime. Therein are revealed mortals' manifold transgressions. Under the celestial statutes, of all evils, retribution for licentious wickedness is the strictest.

Those who seduce others' wives or daughters and dishonor women's chambers shall endure torments in hell for five hundred kalpas. Thereafter they are reborn as mules and horses. After another five hundred kalpas, they may regain a human body, only to become prostitutes, performers and actors.

Those who scheme to seduce widows and nuns and ruin their moral integrity shall endure torments in hell for eight hundred kalpas. Afterwards, they are reborn as sheep and swine, doomed to slaughter by humans. Following another eight hundred kalpas, they regain a human body, yet are born blind, mute, or maimed in their senses and limbs.

Those who corrupt traditional moral ethics through licentiousness, the low defiling the high, elders defiling the young, shall endure torment in hell for one thousand five hundred kalpas. Afterwards they are reborn as serpents and rats. After another one thousand five hundred kalpas they obtain a human body, yet they may die within the womb or perish while still infants; never shall they attain a full, long lifespan.

Worse still are those who write obscene books to corrupt people's minds. Upon death, they are cast into the Uninterrupted Hell. They cannot be reborn into the ghost realm until every copy of their writings is destroyed, and all karmic debts incurred by those who sinned from reading the books are cleared. There they dwell in perpetual gloom, deprived of sunlight, moonlight and starlight, feeding on wind and sleeping upon ice, their skin cracked and raw. Even immortals and Buddhas cannot grant them deliverance. Few comprehend the immense calamity which obscene books bring upon mankind.

Women of fine breeding and virtuous repute, literate and learned, pass quiet days in their boudoirs or sit late into the night by dim oil lamps. Once they open such obscene books, their minds and souls are utterly unsettled. Unable to restrain raging carnal desire, they recklessly engage in illicit trysts and elopements. Such lewd writings bring grave harm: chaste wives lose their integrity, and pure maidens forfeit their virginity. Sharp-witted scholarly youths, well-versed in letters, likewise have their thoughts polluted upon reading these works. Some indulge unrestrained self-abuse; others grow lecherous-eyed and yield to improper liaisons. Minor consequences include depleted vital essence leading to premature death in youth; graver outcomes consist of violating ethical kinship codes, making oneself despised and rejected by educated society. Worse still, people craft lascivious tales adapted for stage performances, train young male entertainers to enact indecent scenes, letting vulgar lechery be openly witnessed to corrupt countless people's purity and moral rectitude. The harms are innumerable. Tracing the root of all these evils, they stem entirely from obscene literature.

Alas, scholars endowed with wisdom from past lives hold the seven-inch writing brush, yet think not of benefiting the world or amassing blessings for themselves. Instead they heap up boundless karmic guilt. Their deeds rouse the wrath of the Supreme Deity. They recklessly cast themselves into icy abysses

and fiery pits, unconcerned for their fate. Truly this is cause for profound sorrow.

Appendix IX Revised *Shou Kang Bao Jian* by Master Yinguang

The principle that virtue brings blessings and lust brings misfortune has been expounded in great detail. Yet people tend to overlook marital relations. Few know there are days in the year when sexual abstinence must be strictly observed. For instance, The Monthly Ordinances records: “Three days prior to the Spring Equinox, government officials send men to ring large bells and proclaim aloud to the populace: ‘Thunder shall soon roar. Those who fail to abstain from intercourse shall beget children with deformed features, and calamities shall befall the spouses.’”

Human blood-qi circulation resonates with the cycles of heaven and earth. If one dissipates vital essence against seasonal rhythms, bodily blood-qi falls out of harmony with cosmic energies, inflicting over a hundred-fold greater harm upon one’s vitality than it does in ordinary times. On days of divine inspection or the birthdays of sages, many, ignorant of such taboos, indulge in lustful acts, profaning the gods and incurring unseen retribution. Thus some upright, honest folk suffer chronic illness and premature death; some endure demotion of rank and shortened lifespan. Such misfortunes often stem from ignorance of the precept: “No licentiousness at improper times; no licentiousness in improper places. Show reverence to deities and observe due avoidance.” Rather than repent helplessly when retribution arrives, one ought to keep abstinence for spiritual renewal.

Originally titled Bu Ke Lu, Shou Kang Bao Jian was compiled and revised by Master Yinguang. It warns adolescents whose blood-qi is unsettled against indulgence in obscene writings, lest they ruin their health, weaken resolve and neglect studies. It also reminds all that marital intimacy ought to be moderated in

accordance with teachings of ancient sages and classics. Grieved by the death of one of his disciples who perished from reckless sexual activity, and mindful of countless others who were to meet the same fate, Master Yinguang revised and expanded Bu Ke Lu, arranging it for printing and wide circulation to awaken the world.

This book clarifies the relationship between carnal desire, health and longevity, teaching readers the way to wellness and long life. Its chapters include prefaces, warnings, testimonies, resolutions, abstinence calendars, advice on conceiving children and appendices. It records the perils of lust, maxims for self-restraint, cases of fortune, misfortune and repentance, alongside methods for observance, calendar dates and associated taboos.

May sincere readers obtain a copy of Shou Kang Bao Jian online.

Appendix X The Inexorable Nether Laws Was Indeed Issued by the Netherworld and Blessed for Circulation — My Story with The Inexorable Nether Laws

I have hesitated for a long time, wondering whether I ought to write down this little personal story concerning *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. As an ordinary mortal, I possess no deep insight into the inner workings of the three realms nor the true nature of the six realms of rebirth. Still, this experience far exceeded my expectations. I had only ever read other people's accounts. Works such as Shou Kang Bao Jian, Deliverance from the Sea of Desires, and Merits to Cultivate Ten Thousand Good Deeds record numerous similar encounters with the netherworld. Yet my own experience is specifically tied to *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. Bearing implications for my future life-path, I have long dared not tell it in full. I only hinted at it briefly to those around me when introducing the book. Seeing, however, that many hold strong prejudices against this book, I feel I should speak out. Though fear lingers within me and I know not what consequences may ensue, I merely recount my experience as it truly unfolded. Whatever your beliefs, standpoint or opinions may be, facts within the Three Realms remain facts for all beings. I only wish people would understand: *The Inexorable Nether Laws* comes from a profound origin and is true and unfeigned. The Buddhadharma reveals the true nature of reality to sentient beings, yet it does not deny reality. As clearly stated in The Diamond Sutra: "Those who have resolved their minds on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi do not teach the annihilation of phenomena." Some take it upon themselves to

act as supreme judges of the Dharma. If you fail to comprehend reality, you cannot truly understand the Buddhadharma. Unable to perceive ultimate truth, you are still an ordinary mortal. Is it not sheer arrogance to sit in judgment relying upon the limited perceptions of your own eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind? Have you considered the karmic transgression of misleading both yourself and others?

Two months ago, around mid-March, I obtained a complimentary copy of *The Inexorable Nether Laws* from a Buddhist supply centre. I seemed to have seen it before. Though I thought it worthwhile, perhaps swayed by certain viewpoints, I regarded it merely as another exhortatory text and never read it earnestly. This time, reading it at the centre, I found its content compelling. At last it helped me make sense of a period many years before, when I felt as though my soul had departed. Walking along the street, I could not see clearly even things merely a little over ten metres away. I was utterly spiritless, dazed and muddled, as if only my physical body wandered about, capable of nothing more than simple thought-responses. It seemed that this might be the evil karma of sexual misconduct: perhaps my three souls had been drawn away before my earthly lifespan had ended.

After bringing *The Inexorable Nether Laws* home, I read it carefully. I found it truly valuable, aligning closely with my own long-term personal experience; the consequences of licentious wrongdoing are indeed grave and terrifying. The thought crossed my mind that it would be good to donate a batch of these books to a local Earth Store Chan Grove so more people might read them. The notion soon faded from my awareness and I paid it no further heed as I went about work, meals and sleep. That very night, however, I had a dream. In the dream, I carried a stack of books toward the Earth Store Chan Grove, and a voice spoke to me: “If you deliver a stack of *The Inexorable Nether Laws* to the Earth Store Chan Grove, you shall attain eternal life.” Upon waking, I felt puzzled and intrigued. I had nearly forgotten my fleeting daytime

thought, yet such a dream had arisen. I wondered what “eternal life” could mean. Even so, donating the books to the Chan Grove would surely be a virtuous act, so I resolved to carry it out.

At work, I located Shangguan Yuhua’s blog and the Shanxin Lianxin Dharma-Living website. Yet obstacles arose. My online banking digital certificate had expired. Alongside *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, I also ordered texts I had long sought, including Compassionate Kṣitigarbha Repentance Ritual. *The Inexorable Nether Laws* was offered free of charge. Try as I might, I could not renew the certificate due to persistent system-time desynchronisation. Repeated consultations with bank customer support brought no resolution. My workplace was located in an industrial zone, so I was far from the city centre during working hours. The process proved troublesome. Still, I did not act out of attachment to the dream, for I had not taken it seriously. I simply believed that having resolved to do good, I ought to persist rather than give up amid difficulties. I therefore travelled specially to the downtown bank branch to update the certificate. Back at my office, I finally completed the order for three cartons of books, including *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, Selected Essays from Huian Illumination, and Compassionate Kṣitigarbha Repentance Ritual. When the books arrived, I delivered a stack to the Earth Store Chan Grove. I barely thought about the earlier dream and had nearly forgotten it entirely; I treated it purely as an act of merit-making.

That very night, I dreamed once more. Two hell-officers appeared, with ruddy-dark complexions, furrowed brows and roughly square-shaped faces. They bore a striking resemblance to the descriptions of netherworld officers in the *Precious Scroll of the Jade Calendar*. Clearly not beings from the mortal realm, they showed no warmth or flexibility, conveying an aura of strict, unyielding impartiality, unmoved by personal sentiment. There was also a third figure, seemingly the local presiding divinity — I could not tell whether it was an Earth God or Hearth God. The two

hell-officers handed me a large sheet covered line-by-line with records concerning me. My name stood at the left-hand margin of each line in distinct script, with accounts of my deeds extending toward the right. Before all three of them, I began tearing the document into narrow strips. The paper was surprisingly tough and hard to rend. Meanwhile, the local presiding divinity drew the two hell-officers aside for private consultation. I kept tearing until they returned. They then instructed me to set the remains fully ablaze, as if to dispel my lingering misgivings forever. Once the burning was done, the two hell-officers stood, cast me a glance with their unrelentingly official, unapproachable demeanor, and departed. I woke up, utterly baffled. It had been such a vivid dream, as if everything had truly just happened. Knowing nothing of the inner workings of the three realms nor the full truth of the six realms of rebirth, I dared not speak of it to others. Yet I became convinced that *The Inexorable Nether Laws* was indeed issued and blessed for circulation by the netherworld authorities. The denizens of the netherworld keep their word and act exactly as they promise. As stated in *The Inexorable Nether Laws*: “All who uphold the karmic laws shall ascend to heaven and have their names struck from the hellish registers.” Likewise, it teaches: “Do not imagine that secret deeds go unseen. Every thought of good or evil is directly transmitted to the karmic ledgers of the netherworld.”

I thought that would be the end of it. Little did I expect that I would meet that netherworld officer again not long afterwards. This time, he did not come to me; instead, I was summoned down to the netherworld. To tell this story properly, I must begin with an interlude. Two years ago, I visited Jiuhua Mountain and stayed at Xitian Temple. No sooner had I settled in than I went to the main hall to pay homage to the Buddha. When I stood up after finishing my prostrations and walked toward the exit, an elderly nun sitting behind a table near the doorway called me over. “You recite the Diamond Sutra at home, do you not?” she said. I had a pocket-sized

copy of the Diamond Sutra tucked inside the breast pocket of my jacket. Surprised, I replied, “Why yes, I do carry the Diamond Sutra with me,” and proceeded to take it out. The elderly nun said, “I am not speaking of you carrying it on your person. I mean you have been reciting the Diamond Sutra consistently, for at least three months.” I was astonished. I had never met anyone who could perceive such a thing. It was true; I had indeed been reading the Diamond Sutra during that period. I called over my son, nephew and niece who were travelling with me. The old nun spoke concisely, and everything she said rang true. They were greatly encouraged by her words. That evening when I returned to the main hall, I saw a young woman kneeling before the Buddha reciting the Earth Store Sutra. Someone who seemed to be her mother stood nearby at the door. I learned they had travelled from Northeast China. The nun had also told her many accurate things about herself, so she had resolved to recite the Earth Store Sutra on the mountain throughout her trip. The elderly nun was extraordinarily compassionate. Patiently and tirelessly, she guided us from every angle, urging us to cultivate our spiritual practice earnestly. She spoke of daily life, family and career, linking past-life causes to present-life circumstances. She also counseled my wife and gave us many sutra books, prayer beads and devotional ornaments. My wife was deeply moved, and for some time after returning home, she faithfully read the Earth Store Sutra. Before we left the mountain, I asked the nun whether I would face any disasters or hardships in the future. She handed me a copy of the Earth Store Sutra together with an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva and said, “Ask no more questions. Since you work during weekdays, simply recite the whole Earth Store Sutra at home every Saturday and Sunday, and all will be well.” After going home, I kept this practice up for a while, yet eventually grew slack. Still, whenever I recalled the nun’s immensely kind countenance and her repeated exhortations to me, I felt deep remorse. Roughly in the latter half of last year, I resumed the

practice and have mostly kept to reciting the whole Earth Store Sutra on each day of the weekend ever since.

To resume my story: some days after I had given away copies of *The Inexorable Nether Laws* and had that dream, my spiritual practice grew lazy and negligent (old karmic habits run deep, indeed!). On several occasions I skipped reading the Earth Store Sutra, though I still kept up my self-prescribed morning recitations.

One night after falling asleep, I seemed to descend into a room. Inside stood a long rectangular conference table, as if a meeting was in progress. Seated at the head of the table, seemingly chairing the meeting, appeared to be the same netherworld officer I had encountered in my earlier dream. When I entered, he wore that same unyielding, meticulous, stern expression. “Why have you stopped reciting the sutras these days?” he asked. In that setting, I found myself answering truthfully almost against my will: “I have not read the Earth Store Sutra on weekend afternoons, yet I still recite the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra and the Diamond Sutra each morning.” All of a sudden, a bright, joyful smile broke across the netherworld officer’s face, radiating a sense of relief and approval. I was utterly astonished; such an expression was so extraordinarily rare for him. It felt almost like seeing the sun appear in the night sky. That he would show such heartfelt satisfaction simply because I recited Buddhist sutras took me completely by surprise. I had not imagined that sutra recitation would receive such immediate, special recognition on that plane of existence. Afterwards, he appeared to check records concerning the distribution of *The Inexorable Nether Laws*. On the whole, he seemed reasonably satisfied.

Since I had come to realize that studying and spreading *The Inexorable Nether Laws* brings very real, immediate personal benefits — blessings that no amount of money can buy — I wanted my brothers and sisters to study and propagate it as well, so they too might obtain these rare, invaluable blessings beyond

monetary measure. Yet my siblings lived in different places, which made it difficult to arrange. Then I thought I could give the books to my parents, who could take several copies with them when they visited each of their children. At that time, my parents were staying at my elder brother's home. It was a Friday afternoon, around two o'clock. The thought came to me, and I resolved to go to my parents' place. I boarded a train for another city and arrived at my elder brother's house at about six in the evening. To my great surprise, all my siblings except my elder brother, who had gone out, were gathered in the living-room. When I asked, they all said, "We were waiting for you!" I turned to my eldest younger brother and asked, "What brings you here?" He did not work in this city. He replied, "I was supposed to attend a meeting this afternoon, but it was cancelled at the last minute, so I drove over to visit our parents." Then I asked my younger sister, "Why are you here?" She answered, "I ran some errands this afternoon. By the time I finished, it was nearly five o'clock. Instead of heading back to the office, I came to see Mum and Dad." I asked my youngest brother the same question. He said, "Our parents could not go back to our hometown for the Qingming Festival. I went there myself and only got back this afternoon, so I came straight over to visit them." It was very rare for all of us siblings to gather at the same time. Even for family events, we hardly ever arrived within such a short time of one another. We chatted for a little while, and each of them received several copies of *The Inexorable Nether Laws* as a karmic gift. Since everyone had household duties to attend to, and some even needed to travel back to other cities, they soon took their leave in haste. I reflected that the books had reached them in the swiftest possible way. Surely this must have been the blessing and spiritual intervention of the Buddhas and the deities of heaven and earth, which was stirred into being the moment I formed the wish for my siblings to study and spread this book.

A few days later, my sister phoned me out of the blue to ask where *The Inexorable Nether Laws* had been printed. Her son, a ninth-grade student, wanted to donate funds for its reprinting. This boy had long been a wilful, unruly handful. I was taken aback and asked what had brought this on. My sister explained, "This book is truly wonderful. I was only reading it myself at home and had not shown it to him. Somehow, though, he got hold of it on his own. Out of the blue he said to me, 'Mum, I have committed wrongs.' I asked him what he meant. He told me, 'In the past, I deliberately harmed many ants just for fun. I want to give away all my own money to print more copies of this book. I will make a vow before the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, praying that they may bless and liberate all those little lives I hurt.'" My sister went on, "This book has truly accomplished great merit and done so much good! This boy whom no one could manage has changed so profoundly." My young nephew was bright, yet reckless and constantly getting into trouble, a constant source of worry for the whole family. He used to spend all his money as he pleased and would never let grown-ups have any say over it. Now, of his own free will, he made this sincere resolution, giving away every penny without keeping anything for himself.

In the Samyukta Agama Sutra, there is a parable: "Just as the soil upon a fingernail, so are the sentient beings who take rebirth as humans. Just as the soil of the great earth, so are those non-human beings." The Nirvana Sutra likewise records an episode. On one occasion, the Buddha picked up a speck of dust from the ground and asked Venerable Kāśyapa, "Which is greater: this dust on my hand, or the earth of the ten-direction worlds?" Venerable Kāśyapa replied: "The earth-soil of the ten-direction worlds, of course." The Buddha said: "Those who obtain a human body and practice good dharma are as rare as the dust on my hand. Those who fail to obtain a human body and commit evil karma are as numerous as the earth-soil of the ten-direction worlds." Furthermore, Buddhist sutras state: "Those who gain a

human body are like the dust on a fingernail; those who lose the human body are like the soil of the great earth." Since beginningless time, we have indeed accumulated immeasurable karmic deeds that lead to the hell realm. In my view, anyone who cannot face this truth lacks clear-sighted judgment. Unlike ordinary books compiled from extensive research or purely invented by an author, *The Inexorable Nether Laws* was neither researched nor written from source materials nor fabricated by its writer. The respected fellow practitioner Shangguan Yuhua is merely a narrator, one who recounts what actually took place. She was simply fulfilling an assigned task. These stark, shocking revelations lay bare the reality, urgency and vital importance of practicing good dharma, observing the precepts, and cultivating Buddhadharma.

Lastly, regarding certain people's rejection of claims found in *The Inexorable Nether Laws* such as "Virgin Mary is a transformation body of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva," "I beheld the bodily appearance manifested by the Bodhisattva was the merciful form of the Catholic Virgin Mary" and "The Magistrate explained that the Virgin Mary is in truth one of the manifested transformation bodies of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva". Some dismiss these accounts as "wrong." In my view, fellow practitioner Shangguan Yuhua was merely recounting events she experienced. She has made no error; rather, it is others who fail to understand. As we read in the Diamond Sutra, "Subhuti, what do you think, can the Tathagata be seen through his bodily appearances?" "No, World Honored One, the Tathagata cannot be seen through his bodily appearances. And why? The bodily appearances spoken of by the Tathagata are precisely not bodily appearances." The Buddha said to Subhuti, "All appearances are illusory. If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathagata." "Subhuti, what do you think, can the Tathagata be seen through the perfection of the form body?" "No, World Honored One, the Tathagata should not be seen through the perfection of the form

body. And why? The perfection of the form body spoken of by the Tathagata is precisely non-perfection of the form body; it is only named the perfection of the form body.”; “Subhuti, what do you think, can the Tathagata be seen through the perfection of all appearances?” “No, World Honored One, the Tathagata should not be seen through the perfection of all appearances. And why? The perfection of all appearances spoken of by the Tathagata is precisely non-perfection; it is only named the perfection of all appearances.”; “If one sees me by form and seeks me by sound, one walks a wrong path and cannot see the Tathagata.” Tell me, what appearances should a Buddha manifest, and what appearances should a Buddha not manifest? What appearances constitute authentic manifestations of a Buddha? It is your own mind that harbors views of self and others, and is fettered by attachments to self and others. You grasp at appearances and draw distinctions amid all worldly phenomena, mistaking the illusory for the real, the false for the existent, and thereby giving rise to the extreme view of annihilation. How can you presumptuously judge that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who possess perfect, unconstrained spiritual penetrations and wisdom pertaining to all dharmas, are incapable of manifesting in any given form?

The Universal Door of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva in The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra states: “The Buddha told Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva, ‘Good man, if living beings in any land must be saved by means of someone in the body of a Buddha, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will manifest in the body of a Buddha and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Pratyekabuddha, he will manifest in the body of a Pratyekabuddha and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Hearer, he will manifest in the body of a Hearer and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Brahma King, he will manifest in the body of a Brahma King and speak Dharma for

them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of Shakra, he will manifest in the body of Shakra and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of the God of Sovereignty, he will manifest in the body of the God of Sovereignty and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of the Great God of Sovereignty, he will manifest in the body of the Great God of Sovereignty and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Great Heavenly General, he will manifest in the body of a Great Heavenly General and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of Vaishravana, he will manifest in the body of Vaishravana and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a minor king, he will manifest in the body of a minor king and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of an Elder, he will manifest in the body of an Elder and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a layman, he will manifest in the body of a layman and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a minister of state, he will manifest in the body of a minister of state and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Brahman, he will manifest in the body of a Brahman and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Bhikshu, Bhikshuni, Upasaka, or Upasika, he will manifest in the body of a Bhikshu, Bhikshuni, Upasaka, or Upasika and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of the wife of an Elder, a layman, a minister of state, or a Brahman, he will manifest in a wife's body and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a pure youth or pure maiden, he will manifest in the body of a pure youth or pure maiden and speak Dharma for them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a celestial being, dragon, yaksha, gandharva, asura, garuda, kinnara, mahoraga, human or non-human, and so forth, he will manifest in such a body and speak Dharma for them. If

they must be saved by someone in the body of a Vajra-wielding Spirit, he will manifest in the body of a Vajra-wielding Spirit and speak Dharma for them." It is evident that all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas manifest and preach the Dharma entirely according to the conditions of sentient beings. As it is said: in whatever form sentient beings are to attain liberation, they manifest in that very form to deliver them. There is no fixed form to cling to! Therefore, if sentient beings are to be saved through the form of the Virgin Mary, they shall manifest in that form and proclaim the Dharma for them. How could the great compassionate and great impartial mind of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas abandon any sentient being? Not to speak of the various realms within the six realms of rebirth, how much less the diverse religions among humanity! With the ultimate, perfect and untrammeled spiritual penetrations and wisdom of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, what form could they not manifest in response to the minds of sentient beings? Please reflect carefully! Do not misinterpret the mind of the Buddhas out of your own partiality towards sentient beings! Do not presumptuously interpret the mind of the Buddhas through your own attachment to appearances, craving-clinging, and discrimination between self and others!

Gratitude to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas!

Gratitude to heaven, earth, ghosts and deities!

Gratitude to Teacher Shangguan Yuhua!

Gratitude to Teacher Wenshu Mojie!

Gratitude to all who have contributed to circulating *The Inexorable Nether Laws*!

Miao-Sheng

Supplements

(*Texts intended for* Volume III of The Inexorable Nether Laws***)***



Supplement One The First Hall: King Qin Guang

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddha, I departed riding a white lotus flower.

Ayù: "*Namo Amitabha*! I, Ayù, press my palms and pay homage to you, Magistrate. Today I wish to inquire: where do mortal humans go once their earthly lives end? Does everyone fall into the netherworld after death?"

Magistrate: "Not all souls must enter the netherworld. Departed mortals fall into three categories upon death. First, those of supreme goodness ascend directly to their karmically-destined Buddhalands or pure lands in all directions. Some beings pass through the hells before ascending, yet the greatly virtuous endure no suffering while traversing them. The grade of one's rebirth hinges upon the purity of one's spiritual radiance, cultivated through observing precepts in mortal life. Those who faithfully uphold the Five Precepts and Ten Good Deeds may ascend to the heavenly realms or various pure lands of the Buddhas. Their specific rebirth plane is determined by their observance of precepts and the good karma amassed in life. The merciless karmic laws impose corresponding punishments upon those who break precepts, tailored to each transgression. In contrast, the nether authorities shall protect and safeguard those who generate the great Bodhicitta, observe pure precepts, and cultivate good deeds lifetime after lifetime, until they attain ultimate liberation and consummate, unsurpassed perfect Bodhi.

"Second, neutral mortals of neither great good nor great evil are brought to the netherworld to stand trial after death. Those with no record of major good or evil deeds are dispatched to the Tenth Hall to be reborn directly into the human world. Reborn as

male or female, they enter upper-class, middle-class or lower-class families corresponding to their past accumulated karmas.

"Before every living being's life expires, netherworld messengers, namely the soul-snatching ghosts and essence-snatching ghosts, come to seize their soul and essence-qi. True accomplished practitioners feel no death-agony at the end of life and will not be dragged by karma into the three evil realms: hell, hungry ghosts and animals. Relying on the power of the blessings, merits and virtues cultivated in life, they recite the Buddha's name in deep samadhi and attain rebirth in pure lands by the Buddha's power. Ordinary people, pulled by karma, endure the pain of having their soul and essence-qi seized. The duration of suffering varies with individual karma. When the soul-snatching ghost takes the soul, the person loses consciousness and cannot speak. Then the essence-snatching ghost seizes essence-qi. Once essence-qi is taken away, the body becomes powerless and motionless. How much soul and essence-qi is seized is decided by one's karma. Most beings lose everything at one go, while a small number suffer seizure in two stages. Once a mortal's soul and essence-qi are taken by the two ghosts, this earthly life is drawing to an end.

"Finally, the po, namely one's consciousness, is dragged out by Ox-Head and Horse-Face with iron chains. At this moment, the mortal draws their last breath. Once one's spirit, energy and essence-qi are depleted, this lifetime comes to an end. The being transmigrates into the next stage of life following its karmic tendencies. There is no set sequence for the two netherworld messengers—the soul-seizing ghost and essence-snatching ghost; the order is determined entirely by one's individual karma."

Ayù: "Magistrate, my question is as follows: Vegetative patients have had their souls taken away by soul-snatching ghosts, so they lie motionless waiting for their allotted lifespan to expire. Some vegetative-state patients endure terrible agonies from various

medical treatments. If their families arrange euthanasia for them, does this action contravene karmic law?"

Magistrate: "Ayù, the karmic fortune of sentient beings is steadily declining at present. If sentient beings fail to arouse repentance, recite the Buddha's name, observe precepts and practise goodness, their karmic conditions will only grow worse ahead. More cases will arise where sentient beings end up in a vegetative state or die from cancer. For such sentient beings, their blessing rewards for the present stage of life have not yet been exhausted, and they are known to the world as patients in a vegetative state. Their souls are first seized by the soul-seizing ghost, plunging them into permanent unconsciousness. Once the souls are taken away, no earthly medical technology can rouse them from their coma. Later, their essence-qi will be seized by the essence-snatching ghost. Once both soul and essence-qi are fully taken away, the mortal person remains trapped in a vegetative state until the end of their natural lifespan. One falls into a vegetative state because residual blessings and unresolved karmic afflictions from their earthly life remain unspent, preventing them from immediate death. At this time, their family members must not administer euthanasia to such patients, for euthanasia distorts karmic retribution and violates the precept against killing under netherworld law. If the residual blessings of the patient in a vegetative state remain unexhausted, though the patient has lost soul and essence-qi, they subjectively experience a state akin to sleep even as physicians diagnose coma; they feel little physical suffering. Their family members are then bound to provide constant devoted care — this is the condition brought by unexhausted residual blessings. By contrast, a vegetative-state patient with unresolved karmic afflictions must endure manifold agonies inflicted by various medical interventions. These are leftover karmic tribulations that require time to end the karma. When such residual blessings and karmic afflictions are fully spent, the patient will naturally pass away. If family members

truly wish to ease the patient's suffering, they should perform virtuous deeds and accumulate blessings on their behalf. Ideally, they may use the patient's own funds for extensive almsgiving. A Buddha-name chanting device may be placed beside the patient's bed to play the Buddha's holy name non-stop twenty-four hours a day. Further genuine benefit can be brought to the patient if genuine virtuous mentors stay nearby to guide them and expound the full ritual of The Liberation of the Intermediate-state Being. Though the patient lies comatose and cannot speak, their consciousness has not yet departed, and it receives all surrounding messages and intentions. The finest way for family members to assist the patient is to observe precepts and practise goodness, then dedicate the accrued meritorious virtues to the patient, praying for their early release from suffering and rebirth into a pure land. Aided by the meritorious virtues dedicated by their relatives, the patient shall surely attain peaceful rebirth in favorable realms. Recently, our netherworld has received several appeal cases concerning euthanasia. For the sake of time, Ayù, behold the karmic record tablet!"

I saw inscribed upon the Magistrate's Register of Life and Death the story of a woman from a city in China. She was fated to suffer a traffic accident at a certain date and hour, sustaining severe head trauma and grave internal injuries, falling into coma upon admission to hospital, lingering in a vegetative state for one-and-a-half years, and passing away at a set date and hour within the hospital. Then the text abruptly shifted into dark-red characters: Euthanasia Case (minus filiality).

This mother, who was destined to remain in a vegetative state for eighteen months, had her oxygen tube secretly removed by her beloved son on the second day after she was hospitalised following the crash. Medical staff happened to spot this and tried to intervene, yet this unfilial son ignored their dissuasion and forcibly pulled out the oxygen supply tube. The already frail mother soon suffered cardiac arrest, meeting her death eighteen

months ahead of her predestined time. The unfilial son resorted to this act of euthanasia because he had no further funds for her care.

Ayù: "Magistrate, I find this case somewhat contradictory and confusing. The Register of Life and Death records that this mother was fated to be involved in a traffic accident on a specific date and hour, fall into a vegetative state for eighteen months, and pass away in hospital at another predetermined date and hour. Judging by those recorded times, she ought still to be alive as a vegetative-state patient in hospital. Yet she died prematurely through euthanasia. If it was her fixed karmic destiny to suffer the accident, linger as a vegetative patient for eighteen months and die naturally in hospital, how could her son alter this outcome by euthanasia? Which represents the fixed karma — death by euthanasia, or her natural end as a vegetative-state patient? I fail to understand this point. Please grant me your instruction."

Magistrate: "Ayù, you have raised an excellent question. The laws of the netherworld embody the universal natural principles of cause and effect. Every circumstance is governed by cause and condition and karmic retribution. Each case demands an in-depth review spanning the parties' countless past lifetimes. Even the supreme Buddhas cannot violate the universal natural law of karma. Buddhas are awakened beings who have perceived these cosmic karmic principles and teach others the path to liberation from suffering. The path to emancipation lies in upholding precepts, reciting Buddha and practising goodness. Without practising goodness, upholding precepts and reciting Buddha, one will inevitably drift along under the sway of karma. In this case, the mother's fixed karma was to live as a vegetative-state patient and die a natural death in hospital. Had events unfolded as destined, the karmic bond between mother and son would have dissolved at the end of this lifetime, and they would never meet again. By past karmic reckoning, the son was meant to care devotedly for his vegetative-state mother for eighteen months

until her natural death. All judgments of the netherworld are not based merely upon one single lifetime, but upon countless lifetimes in succession. Claiming he lacked funds for her treatment, the son performed euthanasia upon his mother. This violates the ethical duty of filial piety and transgresses the netherworld precept against killing. He ought to have sold his business and used the proceeds to cover his mother's medical expenses until her natural passing. Their karmic ties would then have been severed, with no debts left outstanding between them. As things stand, the son has incurred demerit for deficient filial piety as well as the grave karmic offence of killing his own birth-mother. This new karmic burden originates in this present life, driven by his greed and miserliness. The mother herself bore no karma for killing parents, yet in her youth she had committed unfilial acts towards her own parents-in-law. Her mother-in-law held great affection for her husband, yet the relationship between the two women was fraught with strife. Now she reaps the karmic fruit of being put to death by the son whom she cherished most. Such is the endless turning of karmic transmigration. Alas! The unfilial son now owes two heavy debts: a life-debt for his mother's death and the demerit of deficient filial piety. As she met her end, the mother endured immense physical and mental agony, consumed by bitter resentment. This was the son whom she had loved above all else throughout her life. At the very moment when she most needed care, instead of doing his utmost to treat and tend her, he obstructed medical staff from saving her life. This gave rise to overwhelming resentment within the dying mother. Her resentment and physical-mental suffering coalesced into a grey spirit-entity formed by this new premature-death karma. This spirit-entity proceeded to the netherworld judgment hall to file suit against the son. This unfilial son has already had his blessings and lifespan diminished. Once his remaining blessings are exhausted, he will fall into the hells to receive karmic punishment."

Ayù: "The son is still among the living. Should he read *The Inexorable Nether Laws*, he would surely be seized with fear. No one wishes to fall into hell and endure torment! Magistrate, is there any way for this son to escape the suffering of hell-bound retribution?"

Magistrate: "New karma has already come into being. Where there is a cause, its karmic fruit shall manifest. To evade evil retribution, one must plant virtuous causes in the causal stage. The mother's complaint against her son is now under review in the netherworld, and there is no falsehood or wrongful accusation in this case. Under netherworld statutes, the son is destined to fall into hell for punishment upon his death. Naturally, the netherworld wholeheartedly accepts all sincere repentance from all living beings who resolve to reform themselves, and such repentance also constitutes one of the vital good karmas that help them reduce their karmic punishments in the future. While he still dwells in the mortal realm, this son must immediately cease all wrongdoing, turn toward goodness, and repent before the Buddhas. Only through repentance, making vows, keeping a vegetarian diet, reciting the Buddha's name, observing the precepts, doing good deeds and safeguarding the true Dharma can he fundamentally cultivate wholesome karmic causes for himself. His act of euthanasia upon his mother is black karma that corrupts social mores. He must earnestly repent the grave evil of killing his mother and vigorously engage in manifold virtuous acts. If his wholesome karma outweighs his evil karma by the time of his death, he may hope for mitigation of hellish retribution; otherwise, deliverance will be most difficult.

"All sentient beings who have committed evil karmas ought to repent without delay. Procrastination deepens one's misdeeds, and bitter karmic fruits will inevitably ripen in due course. Recite the Buddha's name constantly, in hardship and tranquility alike. Form this habit, and your last thought upon passing away will be calling upon the Buddha. With this final thought of Buddha-

recitation, one may ascend to the pure land through the Buddha's blessings and empowerment, transcending samsara of birth and death.

"The final thought at the moment of death for every sentient being stands as one of the key factors determining their next rebirth, and it also forms the very first thought of their subsequent life. All people must guard their ordinary thoughts with great care. This is why *The Inexorable Nether Laws* repeatedly reminds everyone to cultivate the habits of reciting the Buddha's name, observing precepts and practising goodness in daily life. Sentient beings should not merely recite the Buddha's name intermittently, but sustain unbroken Buddha-recitation thought after thought. Habits harden into second nature. If one forms the daily habit of practising wholesome karma through reciting the Buddha's name, observing precepts and practising goodness, one's mind will naturally dwell upon such practices at the time of death. Should people in the human world be reciting the Buddha's name while dying, regardless of whatever evil karma they may have accumulated in life, so long as they sustain unbroken, successive Buddha-recitation in their final moments, they will draw upon the Buddha's empowerment to attain rebirth in the pure land with residual karma. At the very least, they shall avoid falling into the three evil realms and attain rebirth in favorable realms by virtue of the Buddha's power."

Ayù: "Magistrate, I fail to fully grasp what you just stated. You said that regardless of whatever evil karma people may have accumulated in life, if they maintain unbroken, successive Buddha-recitation in their final moments, they will draw upon the Buddha's empowerment to attain rebirth in the pure land with residual karma, and at the very least escape falling into the three evil realms to be reborn in favorable realms by the Buddha's power. Does this mean one need not observe precepts, recite the Buddha's name or practise goodness during one's lifetime, and only sustain continuous Buddha-recitation at death to gain such

rebirth through the Buddha's power? If so, this would seem far too easy. Many Buddhist lay practitioners would likely embrace this idea, thinking they only need to keep chanting the Buddha's name as they draw their last breath to ascend to favorable realms. I often hear certain lay Buddhists remark: 'Right now I have children and family to care for, plus work and daily obligations. Observing precepts is too inconvenient. I shall attend to that when I grow old.'"

Magistrate: "Hmm! Ayù, you have misunderstood the meaning behind those words. Within the Register of Life and Death in my charge, there exist a tiny handful of mortals who attained successful rebirth in the Western Pure Land through Buddha-recitation at death, despite living unprincipled, self-centered lives without observing precepts or reciting the Buddha's name during their lifetime. Let me now reveal to you the full karmic background behind this mortal's rebirth with residual karma.

"As this mortal lay dying, he encountered a genuinely cultivated and certified Dharma master endowed with great wisdom, who awakened and amplified the mortal's dormant good roots. Seven lifetimes prior, this mortal had been the master's beloved disciple, yet in this present life the mortal fell into delusion and abandoned cultivation. At that pivotal convergence of causes and conditions, the deep karmic bond of teacher-disciple from past lives came into play. Though bed-ridden and unable to speak, the mortal's good roots flourished instantaneously, empowered by the master's virtuous conduct and meritorious virtues as well as their ancient karmic connection. Alongside this awakening of good roots, profound remorse welled up within the mortal's heart.

"When the master came to the mortal's side, the mortal was gripped by the agonies of dying. Due to karmic deeds committed in life, visions of their many misdeeds paraded across their mind. Driven by fear, the mortal gained real-time insight into the cosmic

laws of impermanence of life and death and the inevitability of karmic retribution. In that very moment, great renunciation arose within them, and he fervently repented his karmic obstructions, vowed to recite the Buddha's name, and then followed the master's guidance to aspire for rebirth in the Pure Land. Fervently reciting the Buddha's name amid their powerful aspirations, the mortal swiftly attained the adamantine unretreatable stage. The mortal personally experienced the mighty empowerment of the Buddha and maintained unbroken, successive Buddha-recitation until death. In this instance, the blessing rewards amassed over many past lifetimes manifested at the hour of death. To this were added the mortal's earnest repentance of karmic obstructions, his vows to recite the Buddha's name, and his aspiration for Pure Land rebirth. The aspiration-power grew so immense that it surpassed the karmic weight accumulated in this lifetime. This is a special case of rebirth wherein aspiration-power overwhelms karmic force, enabling swift rebirth into the Pure Land.

"Another vital factor enabling this mortal's death-bed rebirth is the Buddha's empowerment. When *Amitabha* Buddha was cultivating the Bodhisattva path in his causal stage, he made forty-eight great vows. One of these vows states that if, at the hour of death, a person recites his name with sincere faith even as few as ten times and aspires to be reborn in the Pure Land, this person shall attain rebirth therein. This relies upon the power of the Buddha's meritorious virtues. Do not misinterpret this in any way. The Nether Laws are based on the karmic law of cause and effect, which spans the three periods of time. All phenomena are subject to the law of cause and effect. Even so, the vast majority of dying beings are dragged down into hell by the force of their evil karma.

"The so-called rebirth with residual karma does not mean one may forgo observing precepts, practicing goodness and reciting the Buddha's name in the present life. The residual karma refers to the evil deeds committed in past lifetimes out of ignorance. It is

impossible to hope for death-bed rebirth through Buddha-recitation while harboring complacency and refusing to observe precepts in this life! All phenomena are created by the mind; all dharmas arise from the mind. Should one resolve not to observe precepts, the white and black attendant deities beside every person will record this misdeed. Without the supportive meritorious virtues gained from practising goodness, observing precepts and reciting the Buddha's name during one's lifetime, one cannot give rise to the right understanding and right view to recite the Buddha's name at death. Overwhelmed by deluded thoughts and agony, the dying being will inevitably transmigrate according to their karmas. Conversely, when you resolve to observe precepts, recite the Buddha's name and practise goodness, the attendant deities will likewise record this good action. Even if your practice falls short of perfection, your meritorious virtues shall be complete so long as you have exerted your utmost effort. Ayù, do you now understand the matter of rebirth with residual karma? You may ask further if anything remains unclear."

Ayù: "I understand. Thank you, Magistrate!"

Magistrate: "Very well. Let us proceed. Only sages who return by virtue of their vows may wander freely in the mortal world and transcend the triple realms. Ordinary beings, as well as practitioners whose karmic defilements have not been fully exhausted, must cycle through the six realms of rebirth — heaven, human, asura, hungry ghost, animal and hell — undergoing repeated birth and death. To preserve the human body and avoid falling into the three evil realms to endure aeons of suffering, one must uphold the Five Precepts: first, refrain from killing living beings; second, refrain from stealing; third, refrain from sexual misconduct; fourth, refrain from false speech; fifth, refrain from intoxicants. Observing the Five Precepts is the reliable way to retain a human body and avert damnation. Those who keep the

Five Precepts alongside the Ten Good Deeds can ascend to the heaven realm.

"Now let me briefly explain the significance of a mortal's final thought at death. That last thought constitutes the crucial gateway leading into one's next life. The optimal state for a dying mortal is to keep the Buddha's name in mind and recite it. By the Buddha's power, such a being may ascend to the Western Pure Land and attain great liberation. Next in order are thoughts centred upon observing precepts and performing various virtuous deeds. Should a dying mortal dwell upon the Buddha's name, precept-keeping and manifold good deeds in their final moment, their consciousness will coalesce into ascending pure yang white light. The purer and clearer the radiance, the more sublime the grade of rebirth they attain. If their final thought abides by precepts and virtuous acts alone, they will be reborn in the heavenly realms. If their last thought clings to relatives and friends, they will take rebirth within the human realm.

"If the final thought at death dwells upon greed, anger and ignorance, the mortal's consciousness will coalesce into an extremely yin-infused black luminous entity that drags the being downward into fall. Ninety percent of mortals, as they draw near death, are disturbed by numerous karmic foes, beloved ones and creditors. These karmic foes, beloved ones and creditors from past lives strive hard to block the mortal's ascent and drag the mortal into the evil realms. Should greed arise in the final moments, the mortal will be reborn among the hungry ghosts. If anger and resentment surface at death, the mortal will be reborn in the animal realm, for instance as a serpent. Jealousy in the last thought brings the mortal's rebirth as a fox. Thieving thoughts lead to the mortal's rebirth as a one-armed animal. There are mortals who perform good deeds in life yet fail to observe the precepts. If their final thought revolves around the pursuit of pleasure, their weighty meritorious virtues combined with their disregard for precepts will cause them to be reborn as human pets.

This gives a general account of the different rebirth destinies shaped by one's final mental state. As for one's blessing rewards, facial features, stature, build, and the fortunes and misfortunes of life, these are predetermined as established karma the moment one enters the womb. All sentient beings within the six realms undergo rebirth via the netherworld. After taking birth, they must live in accordance with the fortunes and calamities already inscribed in the Register of Life and Death, and no mortal can alter these arrangements."

Supplement Two *The Inexorable Nether Laws* — Women's Attire

Dictated by Shangguan Yuhua Recorded by Disciple Xia Bufan.

Ayù: "Magistrate, may I ask: Nowadays women wear increasingly revealing clothing, nearly pushing the limits. Does this incur karmic guilt?"

Magistrate: "Most certainly it does. Such attire draws the gaze of members of the opposite sex, stirring improper fantasies and lustful thoughts within them. Should one persist in this conduct without repentance, one's lifespan will be shortened in this lifetime. One will also suffer gynaecological ailments, marital discord, difficult childbirth or even childlessness. After death, one shall further fall into hell to undergo punishment."

Yuhua: "Does this mean women must not wear any revealing garments whatsoever?"

Magistrate: "Precisely. Short-sleeved clothing exposing the arms is the absolute limit. No other parts of the body ought to be bared. Even swimwear must be fully modest."

Yuhua: "Then may one wear short-sleeved tops and shorts at home?"

Magistrate: "Apart from one's own bedroom, such attire is inappropriate anywhere else in the house. Extra caution is needed especially when other male household members besides one's husband reside under the same roof. One must not walk past Buddha altars or deity shrines in short garments, for this constitutes irreverent profanation. It is likewise unsuitable while working in the kitchen, as the Stove God presides there; blessings will be deducted for such conduct."

Yuhua: "What about dressing this way in front of one's husband?"

Magistrate: "Husband and wife ought to treat each other with mutual respect. Even before one's spouse, one should not frequently dress in revealing, seductive ways to tempt him. Excessive legitimate marital intimacy amounts to sexual misconduct, and one's blessings and emoluments will also be diminished accordingly."

Yuhua: "Magistrate, do those who design revealing garments also incur karmic guilt?"

Magistrate: "Yes, they definitely do, and their offence is aggravated, for they undermine propriety and public morals."

Yuhua: "What about torn, hole-ridden trousers?"

Magistrate: "That is not permissible either. No exposure of the lower body is allowed. Fashionable trends are not necessarily correct. Do not follow others blindly under the delusion that such conduct is harmless. Propriety, righteousness, integrity and shame must be upheld. Those lacking a sense of integrity and shame forfeit human dignity and moral norms, and will be reborn into the animal realm in their next life, with no clothes or shoes to wear."

Yuhua: "Many people on the street wear cropped midriff-baring tops. Surely that is unacceptable."

Magistrate: "Frequent wear of midriff-baring tops allows pernicious cold energies to invade the abdomen, triggering lower-abdominal ailments. It will also affect fertility in future lives: for instance, stillbirth, difficulty conceiving, susceptibility to tumours, or gynaecological disorders that afflict one from early childhood and are hard to cure."

Yuhua: "Magistrate, may one wear open-toed shoes?"

Magistrate: "It is better to avoid them when possible. Outward physical allure can bewilder people's minds, dissipate their upright integrity, and lead them to commit the karmic offence of illicit sexual conduct."

Yuhua: “Magistrate! Eating and dressing are ordinary human needs. How can worldly people know they are incurring karmic guilt in such trivial matters?”

Magistrate: “In truth, many offences arise from impairing the cosmic vital energy and upsetting its balance. The righteousness or depravity of every person’s thoughts is intimately intertwined with the universal vital energy.

The Buddha taught: ‘The three realms are transformed solely from consciousness; all dharmas are manifested solely through the mind.’ Thus human consciousness creates all phenomena in the world. Every good or evil idea constantly influences the external environment. This is akin to how many people question whether hell truly exists.

In truth, hell is also manifested by the mind, revealed only to those whose minds harbor hell. If hell has no place within one’s mind, one shall never behold it. When people transgress precepts and commit sins, the resulting karmic forces bring the various hells into perpetual existence. Hell can never seize the innocent, for they bear no seeds of wrongdoing, and share no karmic affinity with the hells.”

Yuhua: “Magistrate, why do I see certain women followed by two or three male ghosts?”

Magistrate: “Such persons harbor strong lustful inclinations and often dress in provocative ways. Their aura draws lust-driven male ghosts who hover nearby, seeking opportunity to prey upon them. These ghosts drain vital essence, bringing ruin to both body and mind.”

Yuhua: “What remedy is there for those guilty of wearing revealing clothing?”

Magistrate: “Those with religious faith may kneel before their revered founder to confess and repent, vowing never to repeat the offence. Buddhists repent before Shakyamuni Buddha; Christians before Jesus; Daoists before the Three Pure Ones. Persons without religious belief may, on an auspicious, rain-free night at the

midnight hour, light three sticks of incense, kneel facing the heavens, confess their fault to heaven, and resolve never to dress in such a manner again. Sincere, earnest supplication will bring natural resonance with heaven and earth."

Yuhua: "Magistrate, may I pass these teachings on to the public?"

Magistrate: "That is exactly what I wish you to do. May all people awaken, abandon old misdeeds and cultivate virtue henceforth. What a blessing! What a blessing!"

Supplement Three The Bell-Ringing and Pill-Swallowing Hell — Ayù Weeps in Sorrow for Middle-School Students

Grateful for the empowerment of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, I set forth by white lotus flower.

"*Amitabha*. I, Ayù, press my palms and pay homage to you, Magistrate."

Today the Magistrate took me to observe judgments in the Tribunal of the Hell of Licentiousness. He said to me, "This Hell of Licentiousness is newly built. No such vast hell has ever existed throughout history. The original hells were much smaller, merely consisting of the hells governed by the Ten Kings. Yet countless living people committed sexual transgressions in the mortal realm; after death, they flocked here to receive karmic punishment. The old boundaries can no longer hold them. New construction is ongoing endlessly, and the hell realm has undergone reclassification. The Hell of Licentiousness ranks among the largest hells by land area, practically the biggest of all hells. Construction work is still in progress, and it will expand even further in the future." Damned souls of every age come here to suffer torments, and this hell has more subdivisions than any other hell.

We reached the great judgment hall in the Hell of Licentiousness. It was immense, sombre and icy cold. The hell-wardens were hideous to behold, fierce and grotesque, with green-faced, fang-bared countenances. Some shed a dim cyan glow, others a dull crimson, while still others emanated murky grey or deep black. They bore infernal implements: spears, swords, great cleavers, spiked cudgels, iron fans and the like. The

hall's floor, seemingly hewn from marble, bit with bitter cold. I observed that every soul who entered hell went bare-foot, shivering atop that frigid stone surface. All sentient beings appeared small and abject within this place. A terrible magistrate sat enthroned at the centre, and three middle-school boys knelt before him for trial.

My heart ached for them. Two were thirteen years old, the other fourteen. Their offences consisted of indulging themselves in pornographic websites and masturbation, inciting under-age schoolmates to view obscene sites and practise masturbation, and distributing pornographic images via mobile phones. The fourteen-year-old boy stood arguing his case before the Magistrate. "We only viewed these things and tended to our own physical urges," he protested. "We harmed no women. Where lies our guilt?"

The judge struck his marble table violently with a red wooden tablet, producing a thunderous crash. His features contorted with rage as he roared, "Presumptuous condemned soul! At so tender an age you neglected your studies in the mortal world. Brought before this infernal tribunal, you show no trace of remorse, yet you utter such insolent words. As the saying goes: 'The body, hair and skin are received from one's parents.' Before you could repay your parents' kindness in raising you, sexual misconduct exhausted your store of blessings and good fortune, sending your soul down to hell and inflicting the agony of bereavement upon your father and mother above. That is your first great offence — gross unfiliality. Second, you incited under-age classmates to view pornography and indulge in masturbation, gravely corrupting public morals. Third, you disseminated obscene images by mobile phone, unsettling men's upright minds. Fourth, you yourself committed sexual transgression. For these manifold crimes, the nether laws decree severe retribution. Guards! Drag them away at once to the Bell-Ringing and Pill-Swallowing Hell for torment; no pardon shall be granted!"

Overawed by the judge's authority, the boy fell to his knees begging for mercy, yet it was already too late. Two ferocious hell-wardens seized him with pronged implements and dragged him off toward the Bell-Ringing and Pill-Swallowing Hell to suffer punishment. The other two boys received the same fate.

Visiting the hell-realms each day drained much of my vital energy. Horrific bloody visions of tormented hell-beings kept rising unbidden in my mind, and weariness weighed upon me. Upon returning, I had to recite mantras to replenish my strength. Were I to write down every sight I witnessed in those realms, I should never finish, and volumes upon volumes would be required. Still, I gladly offered my modest efforts, so that the world might learn of hell's realities.

Human beings dwell amid thoughts. I kept reciting mantras, using mental power to dissolve those dreadful images. Every incident and every passing moment stores itself within the eighth consciousness, the ālaya-vijñāna. Those who frequently browse pornographic websites or read obscene publications have such material imprinted deep within their minds.

The Avatamsaka Sutra states: "If one wishes to fully understand all Buddhas of the three periods of time, one should contemplate the nature of the Dharma realm: Everything is created by the mind only." The mind and the thoughts it produces hold tremendous power. I hope all fellow practitioners entangled in sexual misconduct will purge obscene images from their minds. If they sincerely resolve to turn away from evil and return to the virtuous path, they may constantly recite "Namo Moon-Light Buddha". This Buddha can eradicate karmic hindrances stemming from lust. Sincere resolution for reform, joined with the compassionate power of the Buddha's name, will surely lessen the risk of hell-torment after death; in favorable cases, one might even escape infernal punishment entirely.

I earnestly beseech all people to keep themselves pure, uphold the Five Precepts, abide by human ethics, and treasure this

precious human body. May everyone cultivate pure conduct and achieve rebirth through a lotus flower.

Dedication Verse

May we, with these meritorious virtues,
eliminate past and present evil karmas,
increase and grow all blessings and wisdom,
to perfectly complete supreme good roots.

May all disasters of weapons and wars,
along with hunger, famine and other calamities,
all completely be eliminated,
with people each practising rites and deference.

May all those who sponsored the printing of this work,
those who transmit and circulate it,
together with their living-family members, abide in peace and bliss;
may their deceased ancestors attain transcendental liberation.

May the winds and rains constantly be harmonious and favorable,
may all people enjoy health and peace.
And may all sentient beings of the Dharma realm
certify the supreme Way together.



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