



One day, a little monk went to ask his master “My dear master, may I know what the maximum value of my life is?” His master replied: “You just carry one stone from our back-yard and try to sell it at the market. If someone asks you about the price of the stone, don’t answer them, but show them by stretching out two fingers. If they want to bargain with you, you also don’t answer them, just carry the stone back home and I’ll tell you the maximum value of your life.”

So the little monk carried a big stone to the market and sat beside it. A housewife walked up to the little monk and asked: “How much is this stone?” Without answering, the little monk stretched out two fingers. The housewife asked: “Two dollars?” The little monk shook his head, so the housewife went on asking: “Then how about 20 dollars, give it to me, so I can use it to preserve my Chinese cabbage.” The little monk was surprised to hear it, he thought to himself: “Oh, my God, it is just such a normal stone of which there are millions in the mountain at the back of our temple and she wants to spend \$20 to buy it.”

So he brought the stone back to his master and joyfully said: “Master, do you know that there was a housewife who wanted to spend \$20 to buy this stone. Now you can tell me, my honoured master, how much is the maximum value of my life?”

His master answered: “Calm down, calm down; tomorrow, remember to bring the stone to the museum and try to sell it there. If there is someone asking you about the price, still stretch two fingers out but don’t answer. If the person wants to bargain with you, bring your stone back again, and we can talk about it later.”

So the second day, the little monk took the stone to the museum, and people there were amazed to see a monk selling a stone in the museum. Some of the visitors whispered to each other: “Why would an ordinary stone be sold in the museum? A man uttered: “This stone must be very special that it can be sold in the museum; it must be that we don’t know its value.” Just at that time, a man jumped from the crowd and shouted to the little monk: “Little monk, how much for your stone?” The little monk didn’t reply but stretched out two of his fingers. The man asked surprisingly: “\$200?” The little monk shook his head. The man then said: “\$2000? O.K., I accept \$2000, as I can carve it into a statue.” Upon hearing this, the little monk couldn’t believe his ears.

He still followed his master’s instruction and ran back to his temple with the stone. Gladly, he told his master: “My honoured master, today someone wanted to spend \$2000 for this stone, please tell me the maximum value of my life now.” The master laughed and said: “tomorrow,

remember to bring the stone to the antique store and sell it there! If there is someone who wants to bargain, then please bring it back again. After that, I'll tell you the maximum value of your life."

So in the morning of the third day, the little monk brought his stone to the antique store, and immediately he was surrounded by a group of people. Some of them were asking each other: "What kind of stone is this one? Do you know its geological origin, and from which dynasty it is, and what was the use of it before?"

Then one asked: "Little monk, how much for your stone?" The little monk stretched out two of his fingers without replying. "\$20000?" The man asked. "What?" the little monk uttered, he could hardly believe his ears.

The man thought that the price he offered was too low and that the little monk was offended by it, so he added: "No, no, I mean I'd like to pay you \$200000."

"What, \$200000?" Grabbing his stone, the little monk rushed back to the mountain to his master, and panting he said: "Master, master, do you know that we are rich now, as one person offered \$200000 for our stone. Now you can tell me, as you promised, what is the maximum value of my life?"

Patting the head of the little monk, the master said gently: "My son, do you know that your value is just like the value of the stone. If you were placed on the market, you would only be worth \$20; however, if you were placed in a museum, then you would be worth \$2000, and if you were placed in an antique store, then your price would go up again to around \$200000. So a person's value is very different in different settings."

Do you get any enlightenment from this story? And how would you evaluate your own life? How would you promote yourself in the market of life? And what kind of platform would you place yourself on?

You should know, it is not others looking down upon you that counts, but you yourself looking down upon yourself. If you leave yourself in the mud, nobody can give a value to your life.

So it is your choice that decides your own future.

You might be wondering whether the boss would never give up no matter how many hardships he faces, however, it is much easier for a staff member to give up; why would it be so hard for a husband and wife to get divorced, but so easy for a couple of lovers to separate. The reason is merely that how much you sacrifice on something determines how much pressure you can bear from it, and how much effort you put in determines how much you can endure.

Napoleon once said that all great people have to endure to be great. Why should great people endure? Because they can endure all the hardships that everyday people can hardly bear. Everyday people might need to be encouraged to bear hardship, while great people might do

without encouragement; an everyday person might be very frustrated and would need to blame others to vent his negative emotions; but for great people, they see the hope and love in all those hardships and know how to turn hardship into something good and supportive.

When everyday people need someone to support them, you should be the shoulder that others can lean on. Remember, Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang once told her grandson, Kangxi (Kangxi Emperor): "My dear grandson, you should know that the biggest crisis for the Daicing Gurun (Qing dynasty) is not the mighty troops outside our countries, but the forbearance in your own heart."

Enlightened, the little monk asked: "But my respected master sometimes you swear at some people, sometimes you are very polite to others, is there any reason behind it?"

The master said: "To those nobler people, you can swear at them, can beat them, can treat them bluntly; however, for the people of medium calibre, you have to be very polite to them, as they can hardly bear those hardships; and for those inferior people, you have to treat them with a smile and be very polite with them, as their hearts are fragile and easily broken, so you can only treat them with good manners. And do you know how much you can be wronged determines what kind of person you will be in your future."