Best~Loved Chinese Proverbs

THEODORA LAU

with Kenneth and Laura Lau

Best-Loved Chinese Proverbs

Second Edition



THEODORA LAU

WITH KENNETH AND LAURA LAU

HarperCollins e-books

This book is dedicated to our family, whose love and support are beyond compare.

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Introduction

The first edition of *Best-Loved Chinese Proverbs* was published in 1995. In our second edition, we have added some new interpretations of Chinese proverbs. We have enjoyed hearing from our readers how these proverbs have provided inspiration, comfort, and a new avenue of communication in life's trials and blessings. The appeal of Chinese proverbs has always been profound and universal. The beauty of these statements is in their brevity and simplicity. Their mission to give a direct message that will reach the heart and mind of the reader is often achieved with aplomb and finesse.

These down-to-earth and succinct compositions summarize and crystallize the penetrating wit and wisdom of the Han people for the benefit of all. Like intense beams of light, these proverbs highlight truths in life that are evident but often ignored or unrealized.

The Chinese proverbs here were derived indirectly from old Chinese texts. Being interpreted in English not only brings out their timeless value but gives new dimensions in expression. These well-tested truths of condensed knowledge can once again be used to observe and to instruct.

Most of the proverbs here are poetically expressed in the words of the author. They are original verse, not verbatim translations of any Chinese text. Some are not even translations at all but are distillations of several sayings from different sources. Because of the antiquity of these sayings, all have unknown origins. Different regions of China may also have different versions. But as they say, to truly know a people, know their proverbs.

It is our belief that the value of Chinese proverbs has only increased with the passing of the ages: they ring as true today as they have for thousands of years. We have retrieved, molded, and polished these proverbs to introduce them in a new and revealing light. We hope that you will enjoy this new edition of them as much as we loved writing them for you.

— Theodora, Kenneth, and Laura Lau

A Word about Chinese Calligraphy

BY KENNETH LAU

All the Chinese calligraphy here is in the proper unabbreviated form of original and traditional Chinese, not the simplified version commonly used in China today. This traditional form of calligraphy is followed in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore and is an important part of Chinese culture.

All the words have auspicious meanings and are meant to be positive, uplifting, or inspiring. Chinese characters denoting negative or inauspicious meanings are generally not exhibited, as their influence is considered unlucky and unhappy for people. There are about five thousand Chinese characters or words commonly used in the language; when these are combined, they produce a rich and powerful vocabulary of new words and usage with thousands of possibilities. Sometimes a single character will suffice — as in the words "love," "endurance," "fortune," and "livelihood" — but in most instances compound characters are used to clarify, emphasize, and deepen the meaning. Compound characters eliminate any possibility of confusion, double meaning, or misinterpretation, for written Chinese is precise in expression.

Chinese is a pictorial language based on drawn symbols rather than on sound, as you can see on the following pages. Words are classified according to their "radical" or root and are located under their corresponding class. If one is looking in a Chinese dictionary for a word related to water, such as "juice," "river," "stream," or "rain," one will find all these words having the common sign of water (shuǐ: \mathcal{K}) (radical: $\frac{1}{2}$) preceding the Chinese character and incorporated into the written form for that word. Likewise, emotions will all have the sign for heart (xīn: \mathcal{K}) contained in their written form to describe where the word is derived from.

Pronunciation Key

The pronunciation key given here is based on the modern Chinese phonetic alphabet.

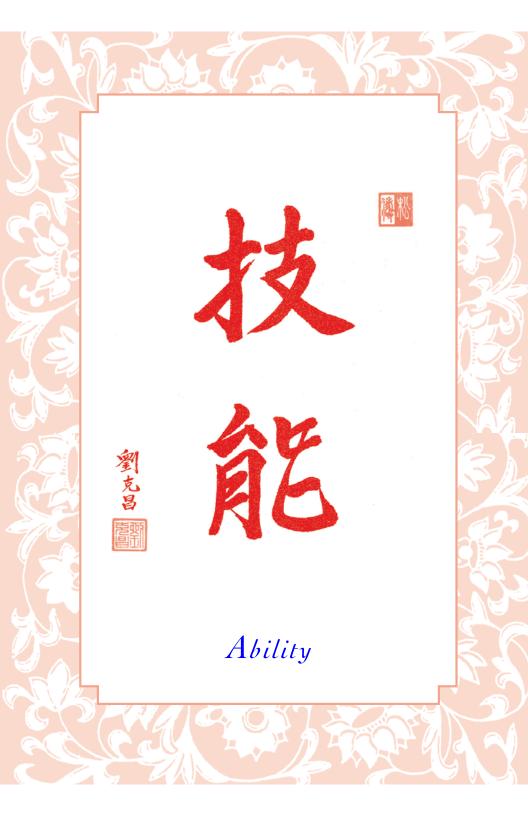
Ability	jì	技	skill, trick
	néng	能	energy, ability
Admiration	xiàn mù	羨慕	envy, jealousy admiration, praise
Cooperation	xié	協	jointly, three symbols of strength カ
	zhù	助	help, combined effort

Pronunciation Key			
Courtesy	lĭ	禮	etiquette, salute, rite, ceremony
	mào	貌	appearance, proper manners
Diligence	qín	勤	single-mindedness, industriousness
	fèn	奮	vigorous exertion
Foresight	yuăn xièn	遠見	extensiveness sight, vision
Fortune	fú	福	wealth, happiness, good prospects, and the ability to enjoy these blessings
Happiness	хĭ	禧	jubilation, joy, felicity, auspiciousness

Pronunciation Key			
Honor	róng yù	榮譽	flourish, abundance fame, reputation, renown
Inspiration	gŭ wŭ	鼓舞	encouragement, incitement dance
Knowledge	zhī shí	知識	understanding recognition
Livelihood	shēng huó	生	birth, growth, procreation live, alive
Longevity	shòu	活壽	long life, continuity
Love	aì	愛	emotion coming from the center of the heart

Pronunciation Key			
Morality	daò dé	道德	road, way, path virtue, ethics
Opportunity	jī huì	機會	chance, opportunity ability, meet, a moment
Patience	nài xīn	耐心	endurance the heart
Perseverance	rĕn	忍	bear, endurance, a knife above the heart
Profit	lì rùn	利潤	benefit, advantage flow, lubrication, smoothness
Sincerity	chéng yì	誠意	honesty, sincerity intention, idea, meaning
Strategy	cè lüè	策略	a plan, a scheme a strategy

Pronunciation Key			
Success	chéng	成	accomplishment, acquisition
	gōng	功	merit, achievement, skill
Superiority	yōu	優	dominance, preponderance
	shì	勢	position
Victory	shèng lì	勝利	success strength
Wealth	cái fù	財富	abundance, rich money
Wisdom	zhì huì	智慧	wit, wisdom brightness, perception, intelligence



Ability



Ability in itself is nothing when denied opportunity.

Anyone can sail a ship when the sea is calm.

Judge a person not by his ability to make money, but by his ability to retain it.

Control the winds by trimming your sails.

Focus your efforts on boning your talents, and you will be better prepared to face uncertainty.

Limitations are but boundaries created inside our minds.

Ability

Only time and effort bring proficiency.

First attain skill; creativity comes later.

The wind and the waves seem always to favor the best sailors.

Those with true skill know how to make opportunities in any environment.

Adaptability



Clumsy birds have need of early flight. Those with less ability should work harder instead of making excuses.

An old broom has its value.

One should value previous contacts and avoid discarding old friends or people who have helped you before.

Make the cap fit the head.

Know where and when to make adjustments.

Better to bend in the wind than to break.

Adaptability

When the wind is great, bow before it; when the rain is heavy, yield to it.

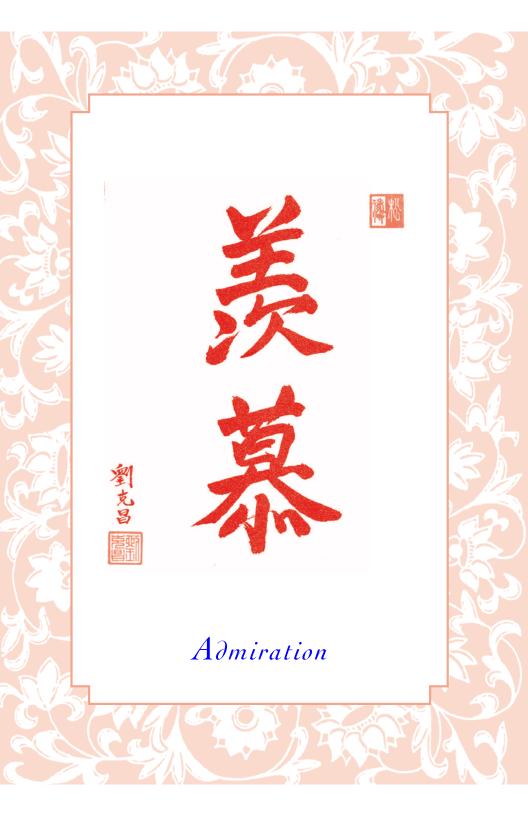
Any garment will fit one who is naked.

One must adapt to circumstances, just as water must take the shape of its container.

A young branch takes all the bends one gives it.

The young can adapt to change with great ease.

Fashion is a tyrant who dictates never-ending changes.



Admiration



One whose breath is felt in heaven.

Denotes a person of great consequence and importance.

The best form of flattery is to master the art of listening.

No matter how tall the mountain, it cannot block out the sun.

A common saying of parents who idolize their offspring and liken the child's abilities to the sun.

Adversity



Adversity is a mirror that reveals one's true self. ~ Adversity brings us into deep waters not to drown

us, but to cleanse us.

One who has never met adversity will not develop foresight.

Unless there is opposing wind, a kite cannot rise.

Opposition and adversity give us a chance to rise to new heights.

Adversity teaches us life's most valuable lessons. Challenges are the most truthful and strictest of teachers. Adversity

Jade is shaped to become a valuable tool.

All great minds become valuable through the lessons of time and experience.

Those who know the storm dread the calm before it.

~ Do not give nuts to those who have no teeth.

> Give challenges to those who have the character to face them.

Trials are blessings in disguise.





To eat the wind and swallow bitterness.

An expression referring to one who harbors resentment, represses anger, and endures suffering.

To have one's liver on fire.

Anger is said to originate from the liver, so this expression is used when a person is extremely angry.

To stir the fire and burn oneself.

This means to bring trouble upon oneself through anger.

Harsh words and poor reasoning never settle anything.

Anger

Do not create in anger what you lack in reason.

In anger, a person becomes a danger to himself and to others.

Do not upset heaven and earth.

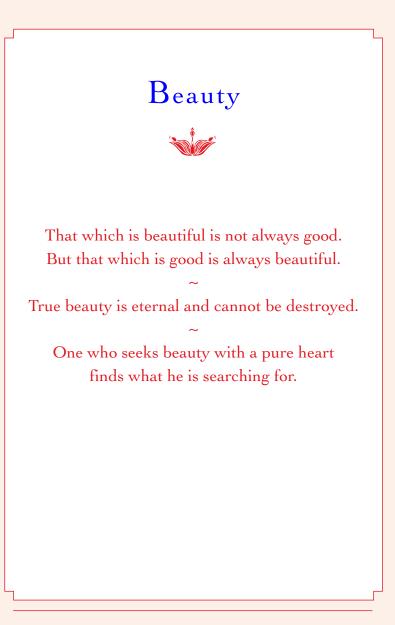
An expression to calm someone who is creating a disturbance or having an outburst of anger.

If you control yourself in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.

Anger is a luxury one cannot afford.

Love, anger, and money betray themselves.

It is wiser to vent anger than to contain it.



Caution



The cautious seldom err.

An overturned cart ahead warns the one behind.

A keen observer is the mark of a great student. Learn from those who have come before you.

Don't jump over a pit only to fall into a well. ~ Be slow to promise but quick to perform. ~ Better to be too skeptical than to be too trusting.

Presumptions will bring nothing but trouble.

Best-Loved Chinese Proverbs

Uncertainty breeds caution.

When fortune flirts, her smile is costly. Be cautious when presented with promised windfalls that require little investment.

A loan is like rice eaten. It is soon forgotten.

Man's memory can be altered when in a situation of urgent need. Make loans cautiously.

It is cheaper to give a small sum than to lend a large amount.

A wolf may lose its fangs, but not its inclinations.

Character



There is no poverty where there is character, and no wealth or honor where character is missing.

One who has character has courage.

Fortunes may rise and fall and kingdoms may tumble, but one's character never changes.

True change in a person is very rare.

Where there is character, ugliness becomes beauty; where there is no character, beauty becomes ugliness.

Compromise



One who would pick the roses must bear with the thorns.

One learns compromise by accepting the good with the bad.

Compromise is always a temporary achievement.

When compromise turns into commitment, it becomes permanent.

One who learns the value of compromise acquires wisdom.

Conflict



Those who are unable to live under the same sky.

A common saying to denote bitter enemies who cannot coexist.

A long journey tests a horse; a long-drawn-out conflict tests a friendship.

Settle a small conflict quickly and you will keep a hundred others at bay.



Cooperation



Strength + strength + strength = cooperation The Chinese word for "cooperation" is composed of the symbol for strength repeated three times. A heart radical is also present to symbolize the common intention necessary to achieve synergy.

A single tree cannot make a forest. A single beam cannot support a great house.

Refusal to cooperate with evil is equal to cooperating with good.

What is good for the hive is good for the bee.

One sings, all follow.

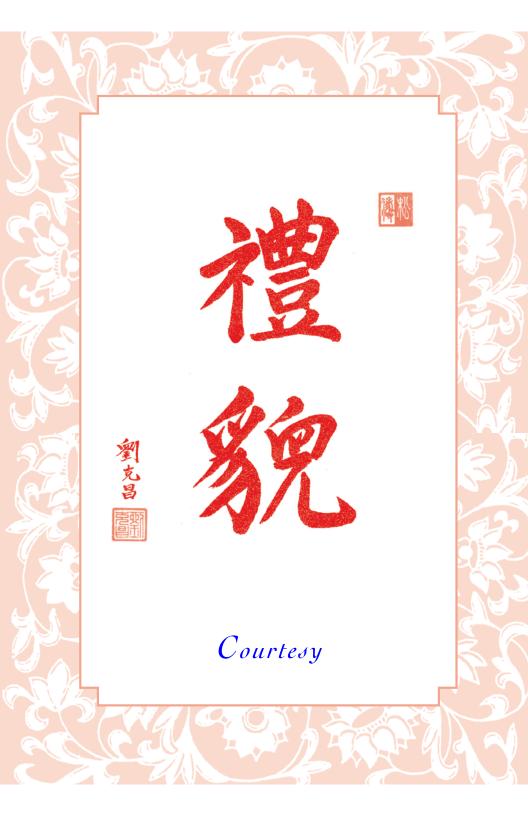
An expression that means everyone is in agreement.

A cloth is not woven from a single thread.

A bridge is not built from one piece of wood.

We cannot clap with only one hand.

Each person equals a grain of sand, but an army is like a block of gold.



Courtesy

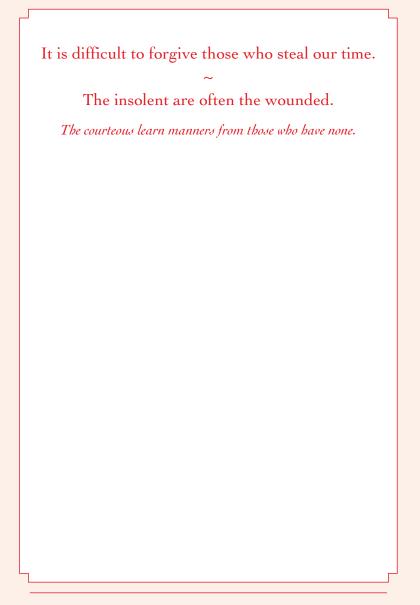


Courtesy is the mark of a civilized person. Kindness is the best quality of the soul. Follow the good and learn their ways. Keeping company with the wicked is like living in a fish market: one becomes used to the foul odor.

> People adapt to their environment, for better or worse.

Kind words can be brief and simple, yet they echo in our memories forever.

Courtesy



Crisis - - 10.



The Chinese word for "crisis" is the character for danger in front of the character for opportunity.

> This means that a crisis brings both danger and opportunity.

No sooner has one pushed a gourd under water than another pops up.

> A common saying that describes having one crisis after another.

One who does not burn incense when all is well, but clasps Buddha's feet when in trouble.

> An expression used to describe someone who calls on you only when in a crisis.

Criticism



Criticism must be used lightly. A gentle wind kindles, while a strong wind kills the fire.

One who hears flattery, but not criticism, will go astray.

The one who snores the loudest will fall asleep first.

One who criticizes is often oblivious to his own faults.

One who blows fur to find the scar underneath.

Used of a person who loves to find fault and will look in the most hidden places to uncover flaws.

Those who need advice most will accept it least.

Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches. Some situations are not open for criticism. There are times when only those intimately involved know where to improve. Good advice is like bitter medicine. Opening a wound to treat it could create a new injury.

Deception



Beware of one with a honeyed tongue and a sword in the belly.

A known enemy is dangerous, but a false friend is worse.

Don't be a tiger's head with a snake's tail.

A strange combination used to describe someone who presents an important front with no substance behind it.

Do not increase the size of your face by beating your cheeks swollen.

A proverb used to describe those who, trying to impress others, puff themselves up.

If the top beam is crooked, all the rest will not be straight.

A saying used to refer to corruption or bribery in government or large companies.

Deception is often not worth the price one pays.

One becomes double-minded from suspicion and guilt.

Deceptive people find it difficult to believe others.

A paper tiger cannot bear close scrutiny.

This means that the threat is frightening only from a distance; it is ineffective when viewed up close.

He who digs a hole for another may fall in himself.

Do not be outwardly a fierce bull but inwardly as timid as a mouse.

Deception

One who is as disappointing as an empty dumpling.

This is used of someone who makes empty promises or fails to live up to expectations.

Do not be caught with dye on the fingers.

A warning to those who might be caught stealing or taking a bribe.

Defeat



Defeat teaches us life's most valuable lessons.

Defeat is never a bitter brew until one agrees to swallow it.

Defeat is never final unless we accept it.

To be unhappy over what one lacks is to waste what one already possesses.

Avoid defeat and you will avoid success.

A tiny leak will eventually sink a mighty ship.

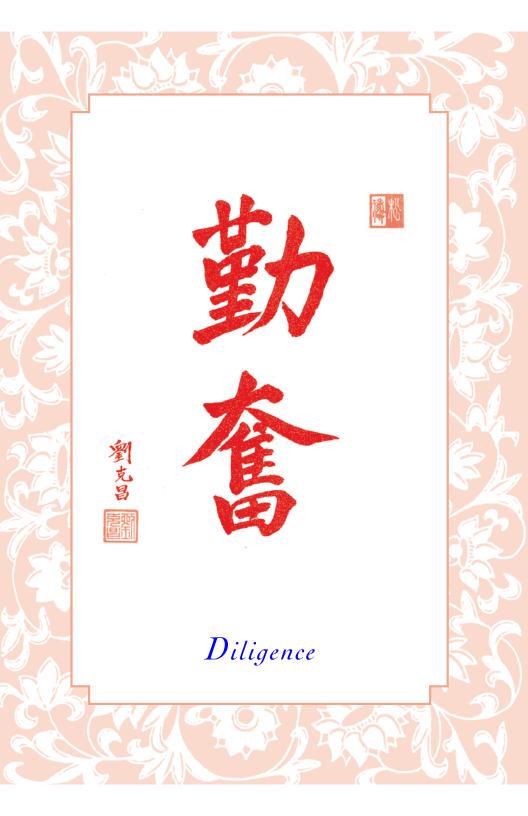
Defeat is often the result of a lack of foresight.

Defeat

An error the width of a hair can lead one a thousand miles astray.

Small errors can lead to defeat. Focusing on the details can keep one on course.

A drowning person will not be troubled by a little rain.



Diligence



Do not hope to reach a destination without ever leaving the shore.

Diligence and constancy of purpose achieve the impossible.

A man of leisure will never taste the fruit of success.

To chop a tree quickly, spend twice the time sharpening your ax.

Discretion



One who is tripped by the foot can get up again. One who is tripped by the tongue may not.

Think before you speak, and do not speak all that you think.

Mastering discretion is greater than employing eloquence.

Knowing when to speak is more important than being an eloquent speaker.

Discretion is more precious than great learning.

Be just to all, but trust not all.

Discretion

For the love of money, truth falls silent.

Silence as well as discretion can be bought.

Silence condemns more effectively than loud accusations do.

If the arm is broken, hide it in the sleeve. One should not display dirty linens in public.

To rise high, conceal ambition.

Nothing is as heavy as a secret.

Falsehood/Gossip



Even the powerful ox has no defense against flies.

An idle story can quickly become fact in the mouths of hundreds.

Good deeds never leave home; bad ones echo for a thousand miles.

Unfortunately, our worst moments garner the most discussion.

When the tongue slips, it speaks the truth.

One who mounts a tiger can never get off.

Once you enter politics, it is difficult to exit.

Falsehood/Gossip

The larger one's roof, the more snow it will collect.

One of the prices of prosperity is the difficult job of managing one's reputation.

True words may not be pleasant; pleasant words may not be true.

Compliments are easier to give than criticism — ponder both.

Hearing about something one hundred times is not worth seeing it once.

Do not judge matters from a single occurrence.

A tongue is the only instrument that grows sharper with constant use.

Two hands should be twice as busy as one tongue.

Shovel the snow only from your own doorstep. Do not mind the frost forming on your neighbor's roof.

Do not lay a corpse at someone else's door.

Do not drag others into troubles that do not concern them.

Truth must take the straight road, while lies travel on the wind.

Family/Home



The state of the nation is reflected in the home.

If each home is strong, so will the country be.

Once one is a teacher, one becomes a parent for life.

The Chinese believe that the responsibility of a teacher is the same as that of a parent.

Govern a family as you would fry a small fish: very, very carefully.

Wherever one finds comfort can be called home.

The lamb kneels to suckle.

A favorite expression describing filial piety, gratitude, and respect for one's parents.

A pearl from an old oyster.

A saying about a precious offspring born to someone who is almost past childbearing age.

If one is in harmony with his family, he has found the secret of success.

Better a hundred foes outside the home than one enemy within.

One generation plants the trees for the next generation to enjoy the shade.





Man can cure a multitude of illnesses, but not fate.

What is fated to be yours will always return to you.

Often one finds destiny just where one hides to avoid it.

Extremes will meet. Everything will have a beginning and an end.

Fate is influenced by good deeds.

It is said that the good deeds of one generation can influence the fate of the next. If one in need is helped by a good Samaritan, another may observe, "Your parents must have been very kind to others to have paved your path so smooth."

A bridge never crossed is like a life never lived.

Fate leads those who are willing but must push those who are not.

A person's character will determine his destiny.





Fire does not produce fire. Eventually it reduces all to ashes.

One should not overwork or burden himself.

A great fire may follow a tiny spark.

A simple idea can move a people.

Do not set fire to the forest to drive out the wolves.

Sometimes drastic measures, although effective, are not practical.



Foresight



One who refuses to look ahead will remain behind.

Weaving a net is better than praying for fish at the edge of the water.

Bend one cubit, make eight cubits straight.

Correcting a problem early prevents more down the road.

Do not build what is permanent upon the sand.

Be sure to have a firm foundation before wasting time, effort, and money in any endeavor.

First resolve what must be done; solutions will then become evident.

One must cut before filing, carve before polishing.

Remember to dig the well long before you get thirsty.

If one takes no thought about what is distant, he will find sorrow near at hand.

Do not hasten to rejoice at someone's departure until you see his replacement.

To avoid misunderstanding, start small.

Communicate early and often when working on a complicated project.



Fortune



What first appears as a calamity may later bring good fortune.

Fortune may surprise you — do not be quick to quit a difficult situation.

The tide must reach its lowest before it turns.

Look to your enemy for a chance to succeed.

Observe your opponent and you will find new ways to succeed.

Every day cannot be a feast of lanterns.

Everyone will know both joy and sorrow.

Fortune

Fortune comes in many disguises.

No one stays atop the wheel of fortune all the time.

Because the wheel of fortune brings ups and downs to everyone in life, the hope is that it will slow for you to enjoy the good times and spin quickly during the challenges.

Earth is to the dead what gold is to the living.

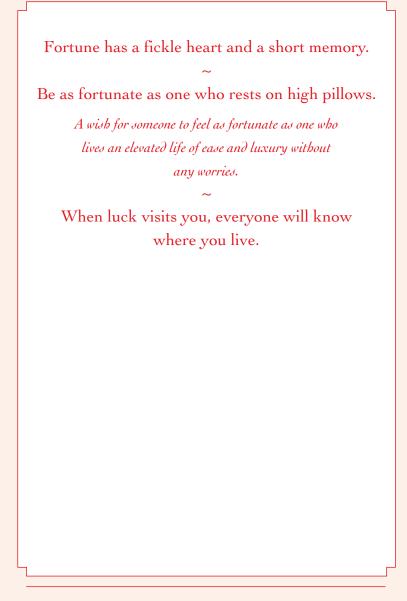
The living and dead have different needs. This saying alludes to a reversal of fortune.

He who has no coin has no power.

To have wealth enough to have your mill run by a ghost.

Money can buy almost anything.

Great fortunes need luck; small ones depend on diligence.



Frugality/Prosperity



Frugality is the mother of prosperity.

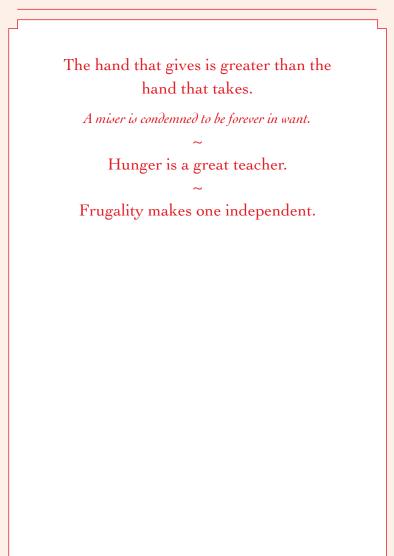
Economize now or suffer want later.

Be frugal in prosperity, fear not in adversity. *Store and save for that rainy day.*

Prosperity brings us friends; adversity drives them away.

One must be just before one is generous.

The wise make good use of prosperity.



Futility

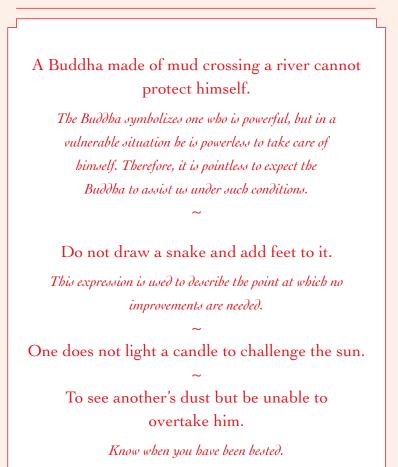


When the itch is inside the boot, scratching outside provides little consolation.

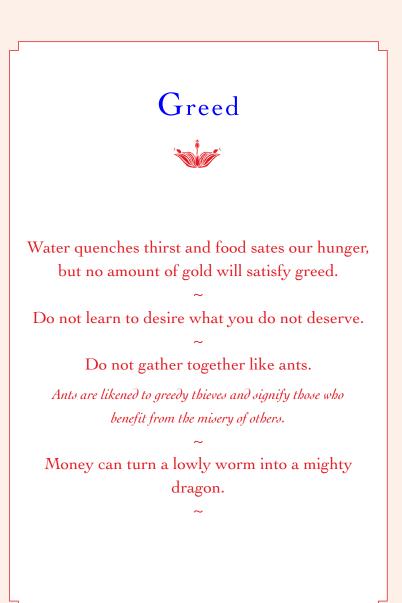
This proverb expresses the futility of not being able to deal directly with a problem.

Don't try to scoop the moon from the bottom of the sea.

Deal with problems directly, rather than from afar.



Wherever there is iron, there is also rust.



Do not have eyes that are bigger than your stomach.

This is a common saying from parents to children, admonishing those who take more food than they can eat.

Our needs are few, but our wants increase with our possessions.

Greed feeds upon itself.

Greed comes into one's heart to steal peace of mind.

One who marries for money must eventually earn it.

There is no greater calamity than being consumed by greed.

Lust and greed have no limit.

Greed

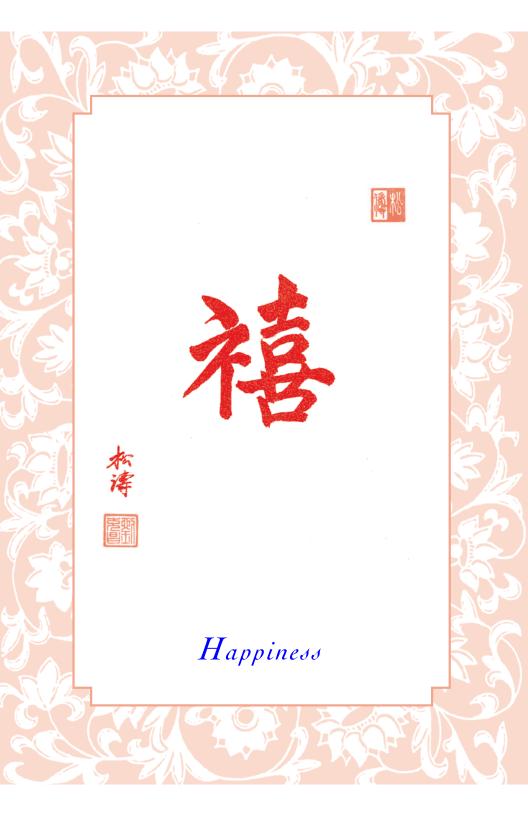
Fat fries and burns itself.

This saying is used to describe greedy and powerful people who are usually the instruments of their own destruction.

One who does not receive just wages will seek to pay himself.

Be the master of your money, not its slave.

To buy a quarrel, lend money to a friend.



Happiness



A happy person is one not trapped by fame and fortune.

With happiness comes wisdom into the heart.

It is wealth enough to learn the meaning of contentment.

Happy hearts are rich in so many ways.

Happiness is when we finally become what we have always wished to be.

To live well is better than to be rich.

Harmony/Contentment



Solitude is enjoyed only when one is at peace with oneself.

One who has a guilty conscience finds it hard to enjoy his own company.

When you drink of the spring be thankful for the source.

Know where your blessings come from and do not forget to give thanks to those who helped you.

Those who seek harmony know how to find it.

Laughter is the music of one's soul. One is never really poor if he can afford to laugh.

Harmony/Contentment

We earn a living by what we do, but we make a life by what we give.

It is better to like what you have than to have what you like.

He who loves music learns to soothe his own sorrows.

Heart



To use with a small heart.

This saying means to use something with caution or handle with extreme care.

To have a thin heart.

This is used to describe a very cautious person a perfectionist.

To treat others with a thick heart.

This refers to someone who is careless or clumsy.

To care for the heart.

This means to empathize with others.

Heart

Do not waste your heart.

To waste your heart is to waste your time.

To have a black heart.

A strong statement in Chinese culture; refers to an evil person.

Sorrowing hearts are always unsettled.

Forgiveness is an act of the heart.

"Forgiveness" is written in Chinese with the word for "act" or "compliance" above the symbol for the heart.

Put your heart at rest.

Calm yourself and quiet your worries.

There is no cure for hidden grief. Conceal your sorrow and you will find no remedy.

Wishes of mind and heart are as hard to control as a horse and an ape.

This means that one's mental and emotional wishes are in conflict and pulling in separate directions.

A calm heart adjusts to many changes.

To accommodate all things, enlarge your heart.

A generous heart knows no bounds.

Gratitude is an act of a good heart.

Music cheers the heart and warms the disposition.

A kind person's mouth is found in the heart.

A compassionate person will speak through thoughtful acts rather than just saying the right things to impress others.

> Good heart, good reward. A just heart has its own rewards.

Heart

Flowers are known by the fruit they bear. One who follows nature will never lose his way. The worst prison is one made of the heart. One who cannot or will not permit oneself to love is one's own jailer. We can find no wealth above a healthy body and a happy heart.



Honor



A noble ancestry cannot guarantee a noble character.

When a leopard dies, he leaves his coat. When a man dies, he leaves his name.

Your legacy will live forever.

An honorable person is a majority of one.

A clear conscience is the greatest armor.

Virtue travels uphill, vice travels downhill.

Life and shame are never equal to death and glory.

He who must pursue glory may sacrifice honor. Shed the bones, change the face. To be reborn and start anew. To lose the glow of one's face. To suddenly lose one's reputation or credibility. A man must despise himself before others will. Great eloquence cannot change wrong into right.

Horses



Be on a horse when you go in search of a better one.

An admonition that one should be cautious when trading up in life. It is always easier to replace something new while you still have the old as a backup.

He wants to buy the best horse: one that does not eat grass.

This proverb describes someone who is too calculating, unrealistic, and never satisfied. This person wants something for nothing or wishes for something that does not exist, like a horse that does not eat grass.

The old horse will know the way.

A clever horse needs only one touch of the whip.

Someone who is intelligent and astute needs only one little hint to understand the situation.

Rein in the horse at the edge of the cliff.

Pull oneself back at the last moment and stop before plunging over the precipice.

Do not doctor a dead horse as if it were alive.

Humility



More demands on oneself and few demands on others will keep resentment at bay.

The superior man does not think himself so. His humility is what sets him apart.

It's something not worth hanging on the teeth.

A polite response that reflects humility when someone thanks you for a favor. This proverb uses exaggeration to minimize the importance of the service by saying that it was so inconsequential that it could not even pass between the teeth.

He who speaks without modesty will not keep his promises.

Little persons try to be perfect, while great ones do not know they are great.

A burnt tongue becomes shy of hot soup.

Mistakes make one timid.

Indecision



The wise make their own decisions. The ignorant follow public opinion.

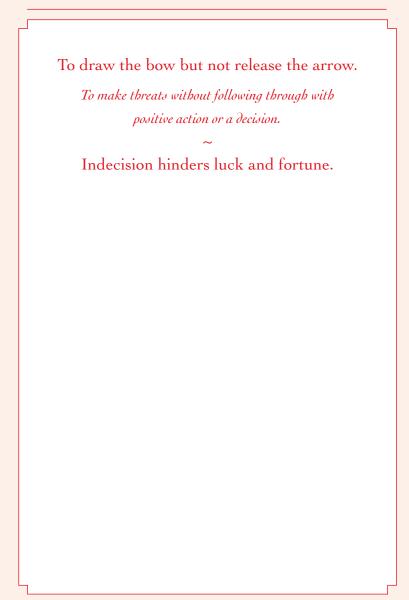
Indecisiveness breeds confusion.

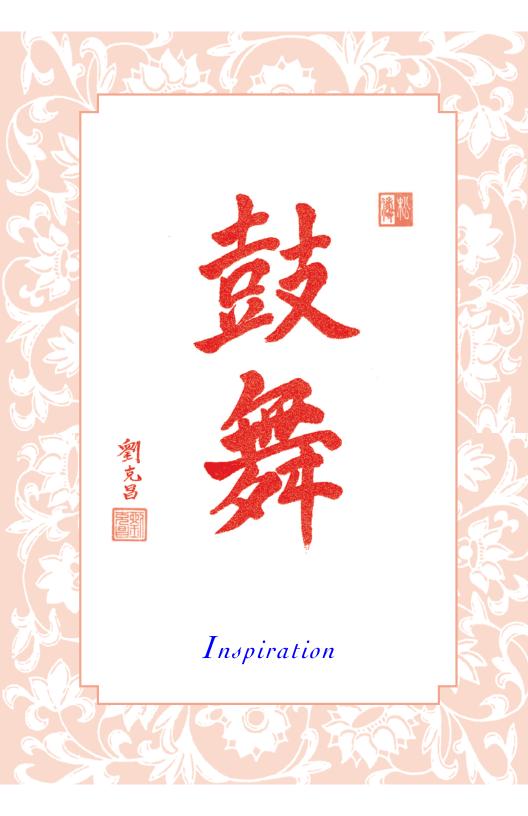
Do not have each foot on a different boat. *Choose a direction and do not look back.*

One whose heart is not content cannot make good decisions.

Reticence builds a fortress in the mind.

One who is unsure or fearful puts up mental barriers.





Inspiration



Cowards have dreams; brave men have visions.

One's merits should not be a hindrance to one's progress.

Review past lessons to discover anew.

Old lessons read with a new perspective can bring about new interpretations.

Do not skim the surface like the dragonfly kisses the water.

The dragonfly merely glides over a pond. Search for deep meaning.

Inspiration

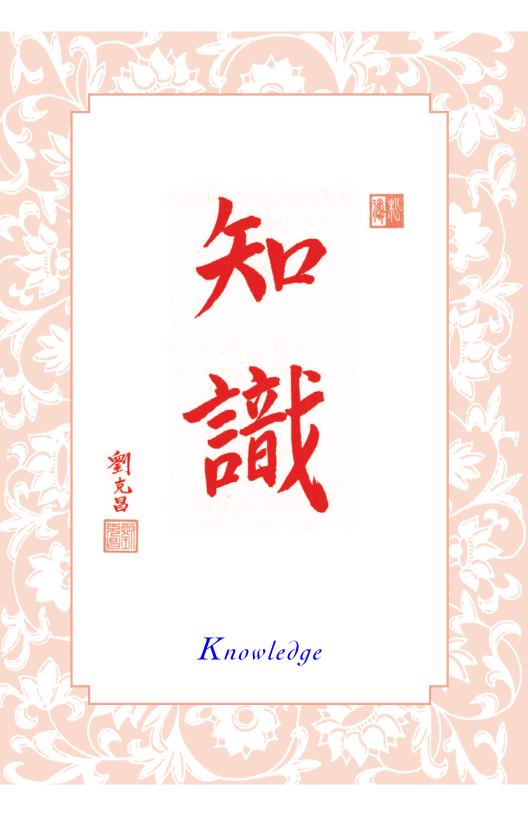
The darker the night, the brighter the stars. ~ Learning is like the horizon: there is no limit. ~ With experience, we will gain full knowledge. Inspiration will follow.

To feel the catch of the lock.

This expression is used to describe one is who able to comprehend the key to the situation, the crux of the matter, or the most important point in a discussion.

A goal without a deadline is only a wish. A dream with a deadline becomes a goal.

Ideas enlarge the mind and never allow it to go back to its original dimension.



Knowledge



By filling one's head instead of one's pocket, one cannot be robbed.

An education can never be stolen.

Common sense goes further than much learning.

Despise learning and make everyone pay for your ignorance.

Ignorance or illiteracy is an expense that society as a whole must bear.

If you are planning for a year, plant rice. If you are planning for a decade, plant trees. If you are planning for a lifetime, educate people.

One who does not like to read is equal to one who cannot read.

A night without moon or stars is like an ignorant mind.

More powerful than any army is an idea whose time has arrived.

A frequent path will become a road.

Wheat stalks heavy with grain learn how to bow their heads.

Matured stalks symbolize learned and humble persons who acknowledge that they do not know everything, while empty-beaded young stalks without grain stand upright in their arrogance and ignorance.

Knowledge

One who knows others is considered clever, but one who knows himself is considered enlightened.

We gain more knowledge from failures than from success.

Advice given at the right time is better than gold given at the wrong time.

One who has traveled the road knows where the holes are deep.

Curiosity always finds knowledge.

To make steel pure, one must refine a hundred times.

Only through consistent practice can one become a master.

It takes a hundred years to train a person.

A trained person is very valuable. Although learning never stops, a person who has more experience is ahead of others.

Leadership



A great general need not blow his own trumpet.

One who is fit to sit facing the south.

Only a ruler or leader was considered worthy enough to sit facing south, which is the most favorable direction.

One looks up at a worthy person as one looks up to a mountain.

Do not intimidate. Empower.

Leadership

If there is a strong general there will be no weak soldiers.

A good leader will know how to assess, train, and use people to their full potential.

One who is able to pull a strand of silk from a tangled mass.

A person who is able to restore order to a complicated mess.

One who is wise in strategy carries an army in his mind.

Without oars, a boat drifts.

One should not abuse authority. To go beyond is as wrong as to fall short.

When the emperor makes a mistake, all the people suffer.

It does not matter if the cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice.

This saying — meaning that the end justifies the means — is attributed to Deng Xiaoping, who used it to respond to criticism of his leadership.

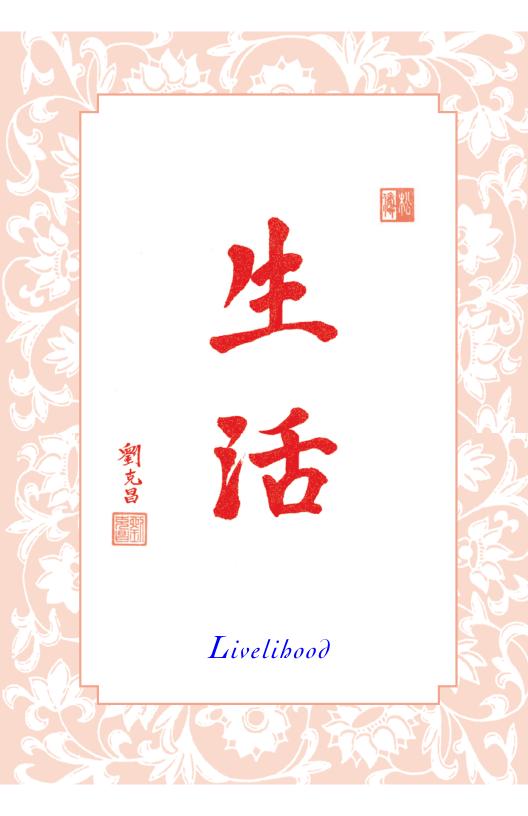
Maintain soldiers a thousand days, use them for the moment.

Great leadership is as much about preparation as it is about action.

To be able to act swiftly, one must plan well in advance.

One who has conquered himself is worthy of leadership.

"Try" is a word of courage, but "can" is a word of power.



Livelihood



Do not become a monk or a nun so late in life.

A proverb that dissuades people from changing their professions or doing things that they have not been trained for.

Do not be a frog sitting at the bottom of a well.

Do not limit yourself to a narrow perspective.

To be as uncomfortable as sitting on a rug of needles.

To be in an unbearable situation, filled with anxiety.

Livelihood

Having to watch the eyebrows and countenance of another.

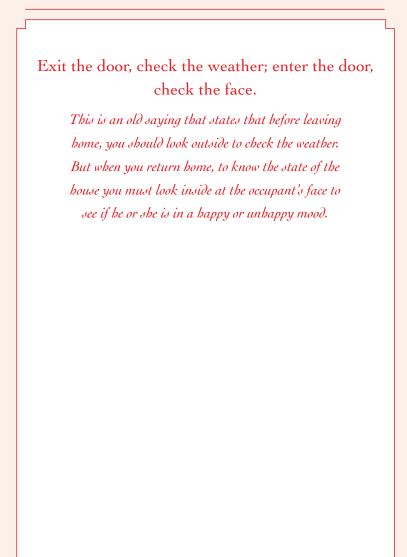
This means that one is in a servile position and must wait upon another or be at the mercy of a superior.

Better to learn one thing well than to know ten superficially.

To earn a living, a man must depend on his environment.

One who may be easy to serve yet difficult to please.

This describes a person who is always unhappy but never forthright, and one who is difficult to work for.





Longevity



Live healthy! Live happy! Live long!

May you live as long as the southern mountain and enjoy happiness as bountiful as the eastern sea.

The traditional Chinese wish for longevity is always combined with happiness because a long life without happiness is a burden.

The leaves of the tree are many, but the root is one. When the root is firm the branches flourish.

A good foundation guarantees success and longevity.

Longevity

Write in the sand the bad things done to you. Carve in stone the good things you want to remember.

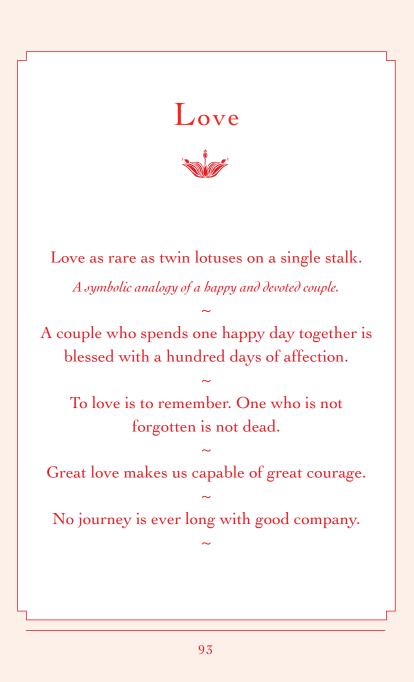
Even the weakest ink lasts longer than the strongest memory.

The young and the bold favor speed, while the old and the experienced move slowly.

The young often lack the patience and care of the old and wise.

Good health is one blessing that cannot be bought.





Best-Loved Chinese Proverbs

Love shows affection as naturally as a sunflower faces the sun.

Love for a person must extend to the crows on his roof.

One's love for others must include acceptance of their faults and imperfections.

Love does not observe the passing of time.

Grow together with gray hair.

A common wish for couples to grow old together in love and respect.

It is better to lose a wager than to lose a good friend.

Everyone can hear your song, but only those who love you will hear your sigh. Love

Love will come together over a silver river on a bridge of magpies.

In China, July 7 is a day to celebrate love. On this day, the Chinese celebrate the famous love story of a farm boy who fell in love with a beautiful weaver from heaven. The distance meant that they could meet only once a year. Every year, helpful magpies built a path for the lovers to travel and meet. No matter how impossible, true love always finds a way.

Misfortune



Misfortune conquers timid souls, while great minds subdue setbacks.

The poor are those without talents; the weak are those without aspirations.

The tiles are broken and the ice is melted.

A saying denoting that fame is dead and the glory is gone.

To be born under the post-horse star.

Refers to someone who has the misfortune of being born to a bardworking life like the busy post-borse that is always on the road. Misfortune

Blessings come but one at a time, but misfortune visits in multiples.

To sit on a cold bench; to have a cold stove.

To be in a job or position without prospects.

One does not drink poison to quench a thirst.

To be destructive and impractical during difficult times—equal to jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

In the land of hope, there is no winter.

Illness can empty any purse.

Moderation



To live long and well, employ moderation.

If one eats less, one will taste more.

A small bite savored will produce more enjoyment.

To extend your life by a year, take one fewer bite each meal.

Pleasure cannot be pursued to its limit, for pleasure could also be a fountain of sorrow.

For peace to prevail, all truth cannot be expressed all the time.



Morality



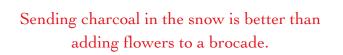
It is better to be completely ignorant than to be ill taught.

Bad habits are difficult to correct. One cannot straighten a crooked branch.

One who is a slave to his senses cannot rein his will into submission.

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Morality



This means that friends who flatter us when we are doing well are adding flowers to an already intricate and well-decorated fabric. True friends will bring "charcoal in the snow," or give us assistance in our hour of need.

Virtue never lives alone. It always finds good company.

Necessity



Experience is a comb that we receive just when we are going bald.

This expression is used when we are most impatient because it feels as if the solution always comes at the very last moment.

The most timid soul is made bold by necessity. ~ Necessity brings strength and perseverance. ~ Necessity forces us to make poor bargains. ~ Judge not one who tries and fails, but one who fails to try.

Neighbors



Anyone can buy a good house, but good neighbors are priceless.

A fallen tree will lean on its neighbor.

Better good neighbors that are near than relatives far away.

A little help is worth more than a load of sympathy.

Nepotism



If a family lives in harmony, all affairs will prosper.

Your ten fingers will always curl inward.

A common reference to nepotism: it is as natural as one's fingers bending toward the palm.

They are all badgers from the same mound.

This refers to a clan or group of people who all think and may even look alike. They tend to view outsiders with suspicion because they are not from the same family.

Obstinacy



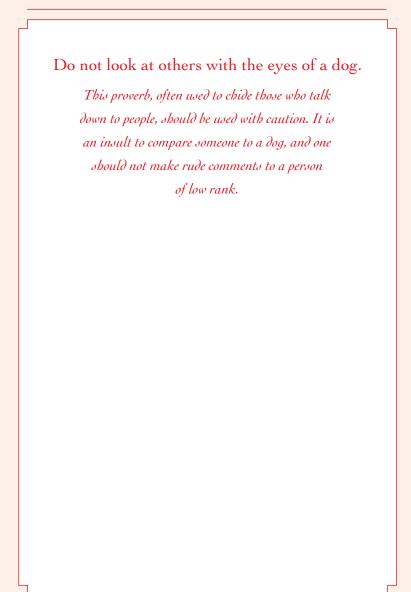
The obstinate person does not possess opinions: they possess him.

Ivy must cling to the wall; porridge will stick to the pot.

When a centipede dies on the wall, it does not fall down.

This refers to laws that are no longer useful, institutions that have outlived their need, or stubborn bureaucrats who cling to power.

Best-Loved Chinese Proverbs





Opportunity



One who gains mastery will create his own opportunities.

An optimist sees an opportunity in every calamity; a pessimist sees a calamity in every opportunity.

Look upon adversity as opportunity in disguise.

Life can never give security; it can only promise opportunity.

Opportunity is like catching the sun's rays.



Patience



Patience is a tree with bitter roots that bears sweet fruit.

Patience is wisdom in waiting.

Do not pull the seedlings to help them grow faster.

This advises patience and warns against unnecessary meddling.

Order moves slowly, but surely; disorder is always in a hurry.

Inspiration comes from patience and perspiration.

Patience

A bird cannot fly until its feathers are fully grown.

Have patience. Do not attempt to do something until you are ready.

Fools who are in a hurry drink with chopsticks. Impatience can bring illogical decisions.

In a struggle between strength and patience, patience will win.

The best advice is often found on our pillows.

Patience is a virtue one must carry when traveling.

Peace/Good Wishes



One who is happiest finds peace and harmony at home.

The seasons will return; all things are renewed.

Difficulties will pass and all will be well again.

Peace comes only when reason rules.

There are many paths to the top of the mountain. Once there, you will find that the view is the same.

A guilty conscience is the enemy within.

He who knows the truth can die content.

Laws are useless when men are pure and are unenforceable when men are corrupt.

May a happy star always light your path.

May it always be spring with you. In China, spring is a time of joy and celebration.

A kind word is worth a cold winter.

The gift of supportive comments can be a great comfort through difficult times.

The individual is the only one who can rescue his own spirit.



Perseverance



Even the tallest tower started from the ground.

Gems are polished by rubbing, just as men are made brilliant by trials.

Perseverance is the water that wears away the stone.

Experience is not a kind teacher, but it is always a truthful one.

Best-Loved Chinese Proverbs

Either do not begin or, having begun, do not give up.

This is a strong statement for the Chinese. It is the equivalent of saying that a person is determined to take something to completion.

To abandon something halfway is to fail completely.

Victory belongs to the most persevering.

Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

Man can live on hope. No other animal can.

To move a big mountain, begin by removing the small stones.





Poverty without complaint is hard, just as wealth with arrogance is easy.

Wealth and obscurity cannot equal poverty and fame.

Poverty teaches value; greed breeds discontent.

Those who thirst will drink in silence.

People who have tasted poverty will protect their livelihood.

One who is discontent is already poor.

Best-Loved Chinese Proverbs

One who does not know when he has enough is poor indeed.

To burn one day's gathering of firewood on the same day.

This means to live from hand to mouth and to have nothing left over.

The contented man, though poor, is happy. The discontented man, though rich, is sad.

One who can promise nothing is a poor person.

Good character is a source of wealth. One who cannot be trusted is not rich.

Prejudice



If the wind blows from one direction, a tree will grow inclined.

A twisted or bent tree is a symbol of prejudice because it receives wind from only one side, just like a person who subscribes to a single point of view and is unable to understand the position of others.

Prejudice springs from ignorance.

What a child learns in the cradle he will take with him to the grave.

A child will behave as he has been taught. Tolerance is one of the first lessons to be learned.

Pride



Pride is often used to cover a weakness.

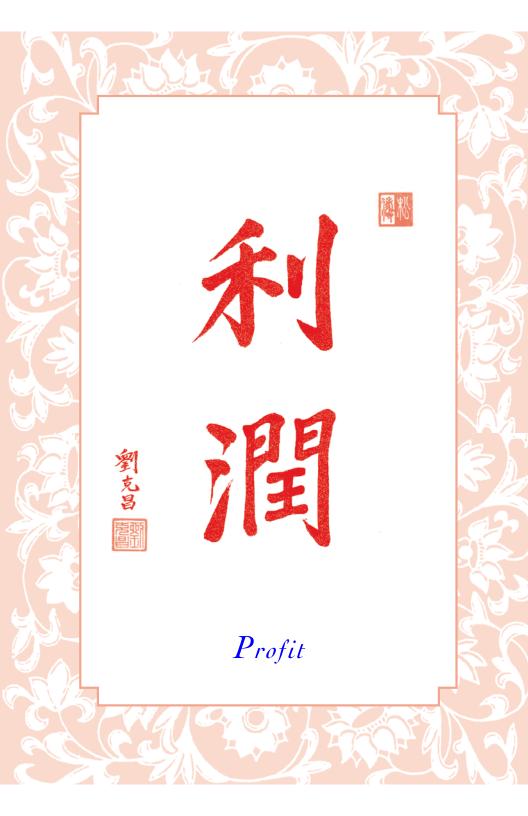
Do not have your eyes growing on your forehead.

Used to refer to people who are proud and often pretend not to see others because they think these others are beneath them.

One's shadow grows larger than life when admired by the light of the moon.

A proverb that makes fun of a person who has an inflated image of himself.

Pride and prejudice are brothers.



Profit



To lose a sheep but gain an ox. To lose something of lesser value and gain something of greater value.

To lose a halberd but gain a lance.

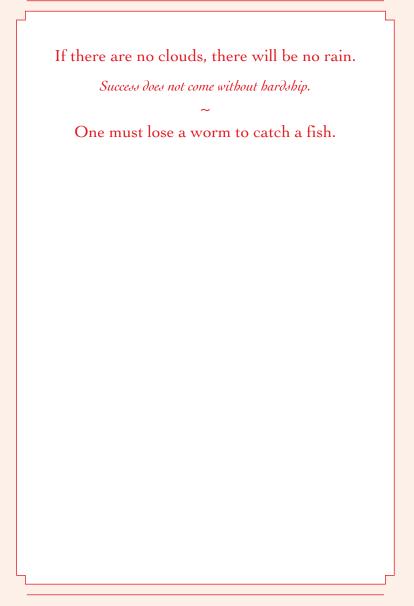
To lose and gain something of equal value.

Profit is always directly related to risk.

Great profit may come from humble circumstances.

Do not profit from the misfortune of others.

Profit



Responsibility



Responsibility is the price of leadership.

Food and fodder must precede troops and horses.

This means that on top of responsibility, one must do things in the proper order. This is the equivalent of putting the horse before the cart.

One servant cannot serve two masters.

Leadership must come from one person. An employee cannot report to two bosses and have a clear direction.

Promises offered in a storm are forgotten in the calm.

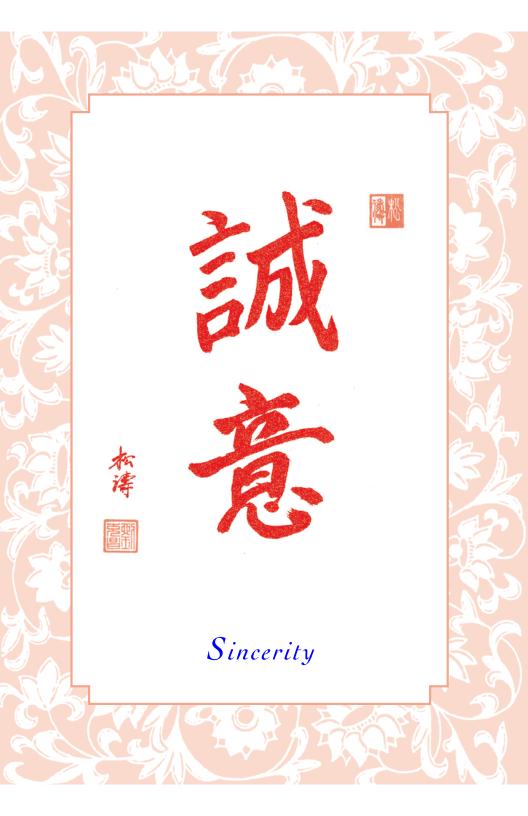
Responsibility

It is often the busiest person who has time to spare.

One who promises too much will find it difficult to make good his words.

There is no one to sweep a common hall.

When responsibilities are not clear, the work will go undone.



Sincerity



Eloquence provides persuasion, but truth brings sincerity.

To tell only half the truth is to give life to a new lie.

The thoughtful never need words to show sincerity.

Better a red face than a black heart.

Honest persons blush when embarrassed, while ruthless liars don't. One who has the best of intentions will blush. To be described as one who has a black heart is a strong statement in Chinese culture. A black heart has a core of evil.

No one has yet found any substitute for honesty.



Strategy



In war, there can never be too much deception.

Beat the grass to frighten the snakes. To flush out the enemy or to drive out the competition.

Do not make a rule only to fall foul of it.

This means to be trapped by one's own device.

Every portal is an entry as well as an exit.

Sit atop the mountain and watch the tigers fight. This saying refers to one who watches two opponents contend with each other, hoping that both will be eliminated. Know your limitations: seek shelter while you can.

To conquer one hundred times out of one hundred, study yourself and your opponent well.

Evaluate the strengths and weakness of yourself and your competitor. Only then can you choose the right strategy.

A fish not caught by a hook may be caught by a net.

The creative strategist seeks out alternatives.

Wait long, strike fast!

A strategy that advocates great patience combined with quick decisiveness.

Do not hit the fly that lands on the tiger's head.

Warns against baving good intentions but bad timing.

Strategy

Whenever the water rises, the boat will rise, too.

This is commonly used in Chinese politics. It describes people who join the right party or associate themselves with powerful politicians so that they can ride on their coattails.

The foolish wander while the wise travel.

Always act with the destination in mind.

Do not remain in the open when the enemy is concealed.

If there is a wave there must be a wind.

This means to understand the consequences of one's action —cause and effect.

Best-Loved Chinese Proverbs

Three simple shoemakers equal one brilliant strategist.

A famous saying attributed to the early third-century strategist and statesman Zhuge Liang, comparing the combined intelligence of three ordinary people to that of one of the greatest Chinese generals and strategists. This means that one should combine all resources no matter how insignificant they may appear.

To leap far, take a long run.

Borrow the east wind!

This is a reference to an important battle in the war classic "Romance of the Three Kingdoms." A general had only one chance to storm a fortress and all his ships had to depend on the east wind to make the surprise attack successful.

Use every step as your base.

A cautious strategy that relies on advancement through small achievements.

Strategy

If one man guards a narrow pass, ten thousand cannot get through.

A strategically placed barrier can achieve the impossible.

If you want to buy anything, ask three merchants.

This is a Chinese business principle that one must always compare offers. This practice prevents a business from becoming vulnerable to one supplier.

Of the thirty-six stratagems, "running away" is the best one.

The "Thirty-six Stratagems" is a renowned Chinese treatise on the art of war. It is often said that the last one, which recommends running away, is probably the wisest of them all.

When one is prepared, difficulties do not come.

It is a common perception that when one is ready for all contingencies, they seldom arise.

Best-Loved Chinese Proverbs

Do not lift a rock only to drop it on your own foot.

Do not make changes just for the sake of change. Things could get worse.

Monkeys must disperse once their tree falls.

To get rid of a group of people, remove their common bond or leader and they will disperse.

To force the untrained into battle is to waste your troops.

A Confucian saying that advises against being unprepared or squandering one's resources.

Kill the chicken to frighten the monkey.

Sacrifice or punish the less important as a warning or message to the real culprit.

Occupy the higher ground to attain dominance. A strong vantage point in combat has the most power because it offers the most information.

Strategy

The best tacticians are never impulsive; the best leaders are never arrogant.

Spectators often have a better view than the protagonists do.

People who are too close to their problems may not see the whole picture as impartial observers do.

Do not attempt to fix with a single bite.

A usual retort to someone who gives a simplistic solution to a complex problem without understanding all the implications.

When the snipe and the clam fight, the fisherman benefits.

A famous story tells of a bird whose bill was caught in a pinching clam. The observing fisherman saw the scuffle and was able to catch both. This teaches the lesson that an observer can gain from the quarreling of others.



Success



True success comes from within. Do not hope to strengthen the weak by weakening the strong.

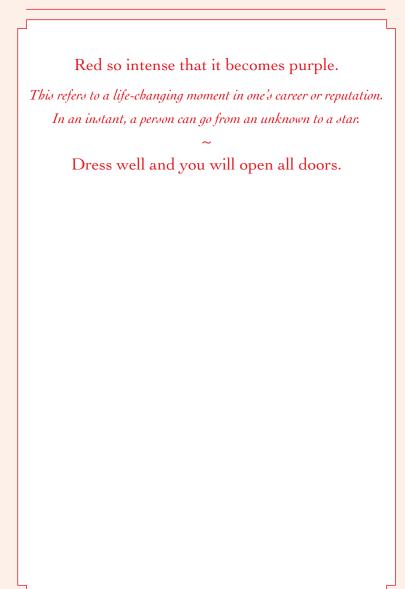
Ingenuity lights the path to success.

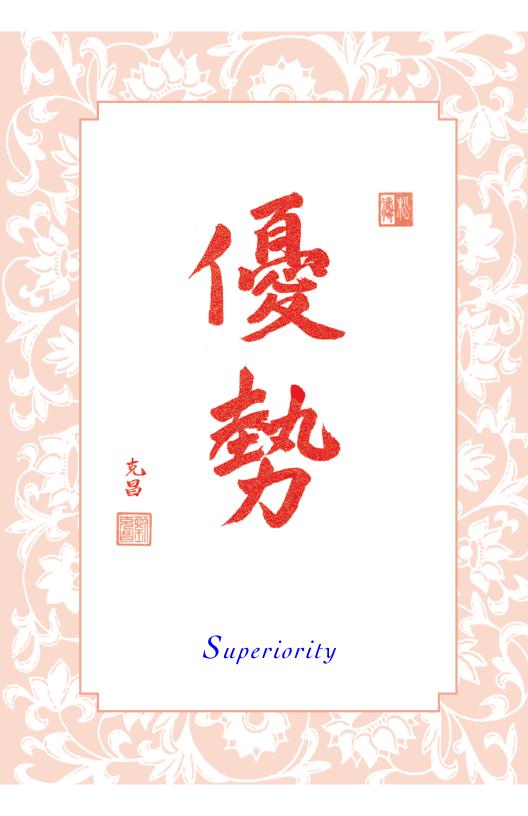
To climb a ladder you must start at the bottom.

Success as unstoppable as the path through split bamboo.

Although bamboo is strong, once it has been split, the break will be complete. This proverb refers to a winning streak that cannot be stopped.

Best-Loved Chinese Proverbs





Superiority



There are three marks of a superior person: being virtuous, he is free from anxiety; being wise, he is free from perplexity; being brave, he is free from fear.

The mighty tree must catch the wind.

The tree in this proverb refers to rich, powerful, or famous persons who suffer controversy, lawsuits, or unwanted publicity because of their high profile.

One who oppresses others is always a coward.

The foolish will confuse power with greatness.

Suspicion



If you are standing upright, do not be concerned if your shadow is crooked.

Suspicion will chase the wind and clutch at shadows. A suspicious heart cannot find peace.

To the fearful, the reflection of a bow is that of a snake.

This means that, when frightened and suspicious, we see the reflection of an enemy or something sinister in ordinary things.

Talent



One who wastes talent throws away his blessings.

Concealed talents benefit no one.

Just as incense emits no fragrance until it is burned, talent is not recognized until it is used.

Water can either float or sink a boat. Its fate is in the hands of the one who sails it.

A poor workman should not blame his tools. *Talent comes from within and is undeniable when shown.*

Thought



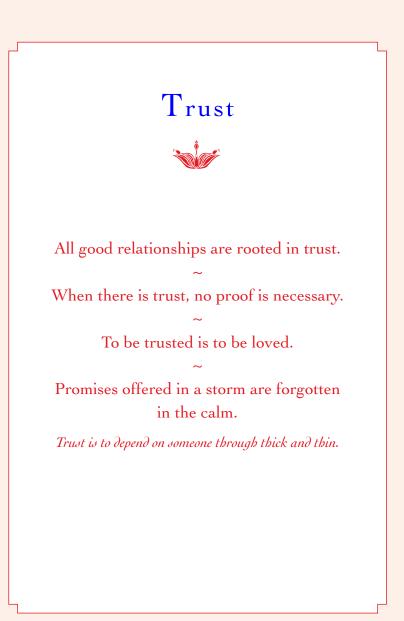
Great thoughts can become great deeds.

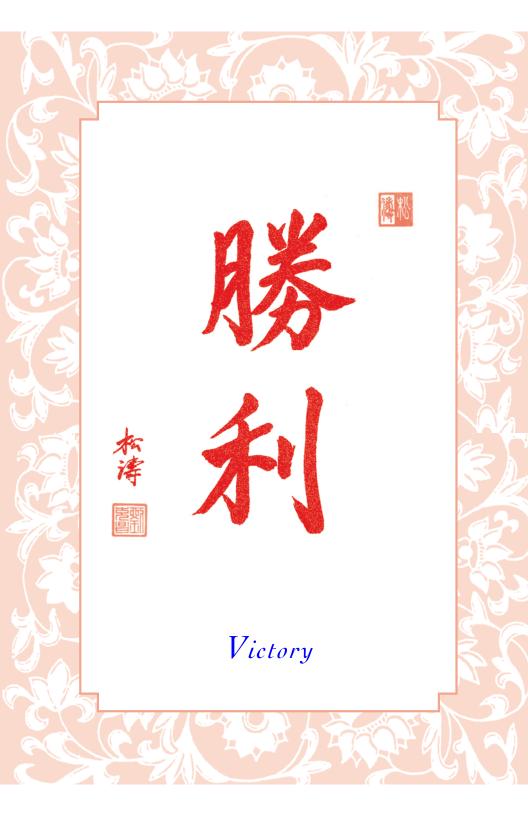
With our thoughts we must build our world.

A saying attributed to Buddha that our minds shape the world we live in.

Learning without thought is opportunity lost.

To be a good student, one must be present in both mind and boду.





Victory



Fight only when you can win; move away when you cannot.

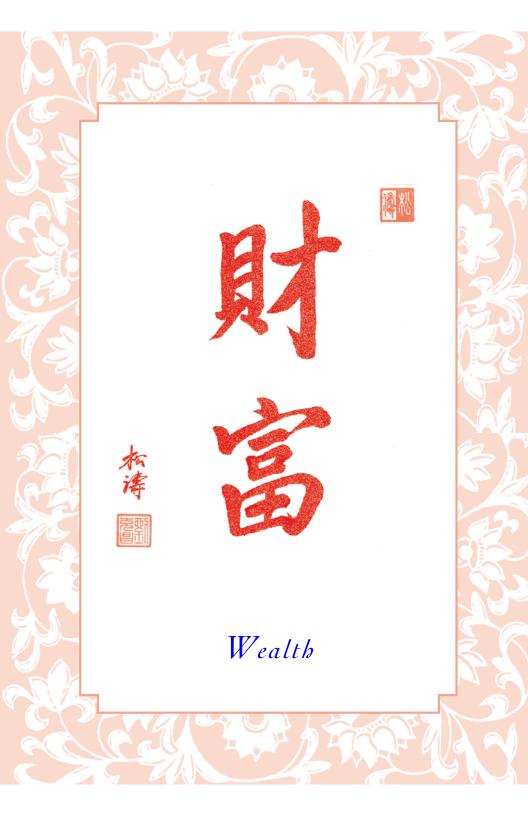
Avoiding conflict is also a victory.

To travel a thousand miles in one day.

A common saying that means to make great progress in a short period of time.

Greatness comes only when fame does not outshine truth.

Success and fortune will follow the brave.



Wealth



Wealth, when used, is depleted. Learning, when used, grows.

What is scarce is valued, what is plentiful is not.

One courts misfortune by flaunting wealth.

Remember that there is always someone who will trade places with a successful person when given the opportunity.

There is no wealth above a healthy body and a happy heart.

If a man has no enemies, fortune has ignored him. One who starts out to seek contentment finds great wealth.



Wisdom



In a crisis, people grow wisdom.

Intelligence is endowed, but wisdom is learned.

Wisdom is attained by learning when to hold one's tongue.

One who knows the most will speak the last.

Wise men may be learned. Learned men may not be wise.

One who is wise enough to secure the good of others has secured his own.

One word to the wise is sufficient.

A wise person knows when to play the fool.

We grow old fast. We grow wise slowly.

Discretion is the trusted friend of wisdom. A wise head must possess a closed mouth.

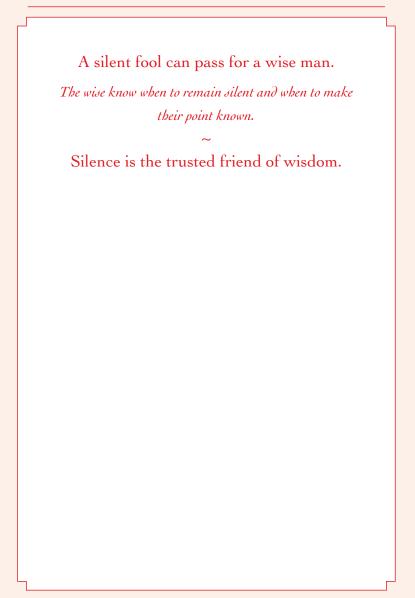
It takes a tree ten years to mature; it takes a man one hundred years to form.

Maturity and wisdom take a lifetime to achieve.

Learn as if life is one continuous lesson.

Youth can look only forward, but age can also look back.

It is easy to blame our memory when our judgment is at fault. Wisdom







The body's pain can be controlled, but that of the mind cannot.

Worry never thwarted destiny.

Do not fret when the birds of worry fly over your head; but when they stop to build nests, this you must prevent.

Doubt can be more cruel than reality.

About the Authors

Theodora Lau is the author of *The Handbook of Chinese Horoscopes, The Chinese Horoscopes Guide to Relationships,* and *Chinese Horoscopes for Your Child*. Since the publication of her first book in 1979, Theodora's books have been translated into more than 17 languages and have introduced many topics of Chinese culture to readers all over the world. She was born in Shanghai and later moved to Southern California with her husband, Kenneth.

Kenneth Lau is an author, calligrapher, and illustrator whose work has been featured in *The Handbook of Chinese Horoscopes, The Chinese Horoscopes Guide to Relationships,* and *Chinese Horoscopes for Your Child*. Born in Shanghai, Kenneth is fluent in multiple Chinese dialects and skilled in a variety of Chinese calligraphy styles. After living in Asia, Kenneth and Theodora have made Southern California their home for the past 25 years.

Laura Lau is a writer whose work has been featured in *Chinese Horoscopes for Your Child*. The daughter of Kenneth and Theodora Lau, Laura is a second-generation author on Chinese culture and horoscopes. *Best-Loved Chinese Proverbs* is her first book. Born in Hong Kong, she lives in Southern California with her husband, Harsh.

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