



Master Hsing Yun. *Being Good: Buddhist Ethics for Everyday Life*. translated by Tom Graham. New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1999, 176 pages, ISBN 0–8348–0458–1, US \$14.95.

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The author of this book is a Chinese Buddhist monk and forty–eighth patriarch in the Linji school of Ch’an Buddhism. He is the founder of the Fo Kuang Shan monastery in Taiwan, and of the Buddha’s Light International Association, which according to the cover of the book has nearly a million members worldwide. It is good, therefore, to see this respected Buddhist teacher turning his attention to the subject of ethics.

The aim of the book is “to invite readers to consider what it means to lead a good life, and to offer practical advice, based on the Buddha’s teachings” (back cover). The volume consists of thirty–three short essays ranging between two to six pages in length. The topics of the essays include overcoming greed, ending anger, how to manage wealth, generosity, not killing, not lying, friendship, gratitude, the way to help others, and faith. These are largely inspirational writings designed to encourage those on the path in their efforts to put the Buddha’s teachings into practice. Each chapter is preceded by a quotation from scripture and there are frequent citations from a wide variety of texts. Although Mahāyāna sources predominate, the author has also included extracts from the *Dharmapāda* and *Āgamas*.

The book is basically a practical manual that offers guidance on how to control the senses, cultivate virtue, and generate compassion and wisdom. The advice is straightforward and unequivocal. The chapter on kill-

ing (pp. 82ff), for example, asserts clearly and categorically that all killing is wrong, and goes on to describe the benefits of refraining from it. The same is said of lying which is dealt with in the following chapter. Earlier generations of writers in the Zen tradition have given the impression that moral values are provisional and that there are no secure foundations for ethics in the Buddhist world-view. Master Hsing Yu, on the contrary, does not seem to feel that ethics is ultimately undermined by metaphysical doctrines such as emptiness. Although he does not discuss any situations or dilemmas in which values or principles may come into conflict, the tone of his writings suggest a confidence that most issues will admit of a relatively clear resolution.

Who is the book suitable for? It is not really intended for an academic audience and its main appeal will therefore be to practitioners who require straightforward guidance on personal moral development in the practice of their faith.