

# The Secret



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Once upon a time in the lands of fish and rice, there lived a rich rice trader called LIO XI 忻欣. He stayed in a small town that was nestled on the banks of a beautiful lake. The entire region was blessed with a mild climate and fertile soils, so the rice harvests were always abundant. LIO XI lived in a grand palace with many rooms housing a great deal of precious furniture. The walls were decorated with valuable scrolls and colourful silk curtains hung over the high arched windows. A large garden, containing countless varieties of trees and flowers, surrounded his palace. The garden was developed brilliantly over the years and the skilled gardeners created one of the nicest gardens in the whole region. Protected by high walls, the only garden's visitors were multicoloured birds and vivid butterflies. Even the proprietor attended his garden rarely. Apart from his silent servants, LIO XI lived alone in his grand palace. Having intention to live forever, he decided to consult an SHOU-HUO 教 (master to the art of living).

The Master came. Accompanied in the great hall, he waited patiently. LIO XI entered and said: «Honourably Master, I would like to live in prosperity forever. Instruct me in the art of everlasting life!» «To arrive in the turtle age, you need to sense happiness and well-being during your life's journey», answered the master. Stunned, the merchant stared incredulously and remarked: «What do you mean by happiness? I own a large luxurious palace. I possess the collections of gold coins, precious turtle shells and valuable jade. Dressed in gold embroidered silk gown, I consume the most expensive meals ever served. Does all this provide no happiness?»

Peacefully, explained the master: «All those things make your life more comfortable, but the happiness comes from within. Happiness you cannot buy, wear or consume! To be happy all your life, you should share your possessions, like a bamboo does.

Bamboo's shoots are used as delicious food and their leaves are used in medicine. Strips of bamboo

are used as a medium for writing on and when laced together they can form a document or a book. Bamboo poles are used to fish, thin sticks to eat boiled rice with, and bamboo branches used to build boats and houses. Bamboo is silent, but can be used in the creation of musical instruments, and thereby send its thoughts high in the sky.

Hollow bamboo reveals the value of emptiness. «Internal emptiness in humans means to be short of a conscious mind and therefore a lack of egoisms. All mankind's problems are due to egoisms and mankind's superiority to nature.» Thanks to its internal emptiness the vigorous growing bamboo has a prolonged existence. It is an example of a positive attitude and integrity.

The bamboo branch is separated by repetitive nodules, but is still strong and winds cannot break it. Storms and tempest may bring a big tree down, but bamboos only bend. The wind passes by and the bamboo straightens once again. In this way bamboos teach mankind the power of softness. In ones everyday life one needs to react like the bamboo. «Not with a rigid resistance, but with a smile and diplomacy. Only then one can overcome serious life's problems. Evergreen bamboo has a prolonged existence just like a turtle», replied the master.

Months later, master SHOU-HUO 教 decided to revisit a rich merchant. Incredulously, he noticed a huge palace fitted with countless residents, fenceless garden overwhelmed with joyful visitors. Under flowering trees, entire families setting on the huge linens, enjoyed their home-cooked meals. The joyful children run barefoot around, chasing fluttering beauties. A floral narrow road brought him to an area filled with marvellous giant bamboos. Nearby one flowering bamboo, he was reverently greeted by a smiling gardener. With great astonishment, in this simply clothed gardener, he recognized rice trader LIO XI. By sharing his riches with others, he had discovered the secret to a happy life.

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