

It's Hard to Cheat the Spirits

VERSE:

Cultivators of the Way must have perfect, genuine sincerity.
False, you cheat yourself; it's hard to cheat the spirits.
Always be careful when alone, and be properly mindful.
When in a dark room or a quiet part of the house, have a conscience free of
offense.

COMMENTARY:

Always be truly sincere. "When with others, watch your mouth, and when alone, guard your mind." CULTIVATORS OF THE WAY MUST HAVE PERFECT, GENUINE SINCERITY. This verse means that your genuine sincerity must be perfect. If you are genuine, then you'll have a response. If you are sincere, then you'll be in harmony with the Way. By being even the slightest bit untrue or the least bit insincere, you will not have any response to speak of. By being absolutely true, you will be protected by the gods, the dragons, the others of the eight divisions, the Dharma protectors, and wholesome spirits.

How did the Vinaya Master Dau Sywan on Chung Nan Mountain move the god Lu Sywan Chang to offer food to him? It was indeed due to the Master's true sincerity.

The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and spirits are aware of your true sincerity. They also know if you are being false; therefore, you cheat only yourself by being false. You cheat yourself, and you might cheat other people. But you can't cheat the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. All cultivators of the Way must become true. Be sincere. Raise your spirits undaunted in the face of any setbacks. Be courageous.

Fail to be courageous, let your spirits waver when faced with any setback, and you will easily become lazy and lax. You will easily begin doing hypocritical things in order to cheat the world and steal a name for yourself. FALSE, YOU CHEAT YOURSELF; IT'S HARD TO CHEAT THE SPIRITS."

ALWAYS BE CAREFUL WHEN ALONE AND BE PROPERLY MINDFUL. Be careful at all times, and especially when you are alone. Be as cautious as you would be if treading on thin ice or walking right along the brink of a plummeting ravine. When with others, watch what you say; when alone, watch what you think. Be especially cautious when you are by yourself. Don't be casual and lax. BE PROPERLY MINDFUL. Don't harbor any deviant thoughts! Proper mindfulness is the mindfulness of the Buddhas. Deviant mindfulness is the mindfulness of the demons. When you have one proper thought, the Buddha arrives. But the demons arrive when you have even one deviant thought. The space of a single thought is critically important.

WHEN IN A DARK ROOM OR A QUIET PART OF THE HOUSE, HAVE A CONSCIENCE FREE OF OFFENSE. "When in a dark room or a quiet part of the house" refers to times when no one can see you; don't do things that go against your good conscience or else you'll be apprehensive. As the ancients said, "Let not the deeds of a dark room or quiet place go against your good conscience." You can be

without fear in a dark room or quiet part of the house when you have done nothing that goes against your good conscience. If you've done no bad deeds that offend your conscience, you will be unafraid even when there is a knock at your door in the dead of night. You will be unafraid even if a ghost comes. Why? Simply because you have not offended against your good conscience. When in a dark room or a quiet part of the house, have a conscience free of offense. Always uphold the genuine moral precepts. Don't break the precept against killing. Don't break the precept against stealing, against sexual conduct, against false speech, and against taking intoxicants. A genuine disciple of the Buddha upholds the precepts at all times.

poem and commentary by Venerable Abbot Hua

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