

# *The Three Realms, the Four Domains, and the Five Elements:*

*An Investigation into Human Nature*  
*by Elder Upasika Men Yi-ping*

## *The Element Fire*

If people can cut off greed for money and sex, and keep the precepts purely, they will give rise to yang fire. In the CLASSIC OF PURITY AND STILLNESS (清靜經) by Lau Dz, this principle is discussed: when a young man reaches the age of sixteen, his true yang energy is complete and full. When a young woman reaches the age of fourteen, her true yin energy is also complete and full. At this time, a young man or young woman is ready to establish a family. From these ages on, the yang and yin energies decline over eight-year periods until by the time a man is sixty-four, his yang energies are completely depleted; he has only the barest traces left. If a couple engages in excessive sexual activity, they will deplete their vital essences and energies and shorten their lifespans accordingly. People of ancient times lived to several hundreds of years. This is because they preserved their primal essences. Modern people think nothing of squandering those precious resources, and as a result the average human lifespan has decreased considerably.

Yin fire people also have the problems of hate, anger, and jealousy. When they get angry, they burst into rage like an untrammelled fire. They don't even want their own lives, at that point. Hatred turns to cruelty. General Jang Fei (張飛) of the Three Kingdoms period had yin fire. He was extremely violent and hot-tempered. When he got angry he had his soldiers beaten savagely. His blood brother General Gwan Yu (關羽), on the other hand, had yang fire, and was civil, open-minded, and cherished his troops. After Gwan Yu was murdered by his enemies in the state of Wu, Jang Fei vowed to avenge his brother's death. He ordered all of his troops to don the white clothes of mourning within three days, at which time they would attack the state of Wu. But because his commands were over-hasty and excessively severe, some of the soldiers could not fulfill the requirements in time. Jang Fei had them savagely beaten. That night, two of his own men, filled with hatred for him, crept into his room and murdered him. Jang Fei met a violent death because of the yin fire in his own nature.

Yin fire people are greedy to show off. They like to make a flashy show of doing good. Confucius scolded them as "good men of the villages, thieves among the virtuous." They put on the airs of being honest and reliable, but it is for the sake of making others feel good towards them. Actually they harbor ulterior motives. When they perform some incidental acts of goodness, they want others to repay them in the future, or to return the favor in some way. This is like loaning money at a high interest rate. It is not true goodness.

What is true goodness? It is when your body, mouth, and mind are completely wholesome. You should be yielding and modest. Your words should be gentle and understanding, not sarcastic or bitter. And your mind should be without thoughts of anger or resentment towards others' faults. Confucius put it this way: "Clever words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with beneficence." Those who speak sweet and flowery words to you, who wait on you hand and foot, are seldom truly virtuous. If they engage in acts of goodness, it is because they wish for a good reward. If they don't get the reward they expect, they become caustic and hateful. A saying goes.

If you do good but do not see a good reward, it is because you still have unpaid debts from your past lives.

If you do evil but do not see an evil retribution, it is because you still have virtue remaining from your past lives.

In the end, everything comes under the natural law of cause and effect. If people engage in vice, but seem to enjoy a pleasant life, it's because they still have virtue remaining from past lives' good deeds. When their blessings and virtue are exhausted, these people will have to suffer the repercussions from the vices.

Yin fire people are not respectful. They speak in a domineering way and oppress and bully others--how could they foster virtue in this way? They are like burning flames, searing others with their words. "A fierce blaze can consume an entire prairie." Yin fire people can lose an entire family fortune and their offspring can come to complete ruin, all because of their own ruthlessness and cruelty. We have the saying, "If you did not set out the cat dish, why would the flies come?" We are responsible for the particular circumstances of our lives. Therefore we should ask ourselves: "What kind of fire do I have?" If you are hateful and resentful, and totally relentless, then you have the yin fire of arrogance. The lives of arrogant people are fraught with bitterness. They run into difficulties at every turn. If you have such a problem, you should try your best to subdue it.

I want to tell you now about how I tried to subdue my own yin fire. I was twenty-two and working with the Path of Virtue Society at Chang Chwun, Ji Lin Province. The Jang family of Ah Cheng county, Heilungjiang province, asked for our help. The old man of the family, as well as several others, were opium addicts. They did not get along. I went with another young woman, Jang Wen-lan, age twenty-one. She was fiercely determined to help them kick their habit. The moment she got into the Jang house, she bowed to the old man Jang and said, "We have the same surname, and so I'll bow to you as my godfather. If you continue to smoke opium and ruin your family, I will never be able to walk into your house again!"

We stayed with the Jang family for seven days. Wen-lan exhausted her efforts in exhorting them to change. She kept the old man company, using all sorts of skill-in-means to help him reform. Finally, because of her utmost sincerity, the old man snapped his pipe in two and vowed, "From today onwards, if I take one more puff of opium, then I am no longer called Jang!"

Six members of the family, including his son and daughter-in-law, were also opium addicts. Seeing their father kick the habit influenced them to reform, too, and the family was restored to harmony and order.

After the Jang family got back on its feet, they expressed the wish to set up a branch-society at Ah Cheng county. Jang Wen-lan went back to Chang Chwun, while I stayed behind to help set up the new society-branch office. There were six or seven of us engaged in this work. Our leader was a member of the board of directors called Cheng Jing-he (程景和). The Opening was scheduled for the eighteenth day of the fourth month, the invitations had been sent, and important people such as the head of the police, the governor, and other important county officials had been invited.

But something unexpected happened. On the thirteenth day of the fourth month, the police suddenly issued a summons for Cheng Jing-he, for the purpose of interrogating him. After two days they still had not released him. We were only a couple days away from the Opening. I was twenty-four and not experienced enough to shoulder the weight of the responsibility. I was stricken with anxiety. I started to search deeply into my own character. I understood the mishap had been brought on, at least in part, by my fiery nature. Thereupon I lit incense and made a formal plea to heaven. I emulated the style of

General Yau Fei (岳飛) whose mother tattooed the words, "Repay your country's kindness with utmost loyalty " on his back. I lit seventy-two sticks of incense on my chest, arranging the incense in the form of the character "virtue" (德), vowing that virtue would be my lifelong goal, and that I would entirely dedicate myself to this endeavor. After lighting the incense, I calmed down considerably. On the third day after his arrest, Cheng Jing-he was released. The police had merely questioned him as to the intention of our setting up a new society branch. They did not give him any trouble, and they did not beat him. He returned exactly in time for the Opening. How relieved I was!

On the day of the Opening, the Deputy Governor, a Japanese man, attended the ceremony. A grade school was officially opened. One hundred students applied, and we were able to establish our standard training course for adults as well. Everything went smoothly. It was an educational experience for me. I learned that when one is sincere and earnest to the utmost, One can bring about a response. Only when we are not sincere and earnest to the utmost do we give in to anxiety and apprehension. Utmost sincerity can move heaven. How does one become sincere? One does it by searching into one's conscience and then bringing forth the yang fire of clarity and understanding.