

Water-Mirror Averting the Tide of Destiny

In Memory of Layman Cheng Tyan-Syi

Essays and Verses by Venerable Master Hua

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THE ELDER CHENG TYAN-SYI LIVED IN THE BACK PART OF SYING LUNG GOU VILLAGE IN THE SOUTHWESTERN PART OF HARBIN. This elder upasaka is someone I knew from Manchuria. Most people called him Virtuous Man Cheng, because he liked to help people. In the past he lived in the back part of Sying Lung Gou village in the southwestern part of Harbin. I often went to his house and have stayed there on many occasions. When I was still a novice, I often went to Harbin, and sometimes I would stop at his home on my way. He and his family would always invite me to stay there.

One time a man in his household became possessed by a demonic ghost. He was always acting up and trying to set fire to Layman Cheng's house. Layman Cheng was scared. He took a carriage and came to our monastery to call on the Abbot. It was New Year's eve. He asked the Venerable Abbot, Great Master Chang Ren, to exorcise the demon. The Abbot did not want to get involved in this mess and so he asked me to take care of it. I said, "Why would I want to be a busybody and mind other people's business?"

The Abbot said, "Elder Layman Cheng has made significant contributions to our monastery. Right now he has trouble in his household, and so you should go over and take a look."

When I entered the house, the possessed man was standing in the north part of the house. I took a seat on the brick bed on the south side. The possessed man took sidelong glances at me, shielding his eyes. Other people asked him, "Why are you looking at the Dharma Master that way?"

He said, "I can't open my eyes. It's so bright! " And then, all of a sudden, he stood up straight, and the demon was exorcised from his body. From that day on, the man no longer wanted to set fire to the house; he was cured.

I was in my early twenties--maybe twenty-two--at the time. After that, Layman Cheng treated me especially kindly. I was a young novice dressed in rag robes, having just left the home-life, but he always bowed to me. His grandson and granddaughter and many of his other relatives took refuge with me. I had no choice but to accept them as disciples. This layman would never have imagined that in the future I would compose a short essay in commemoration of him. This is something he would never have conceived of. Since I left the Mainland a long time ago, I realize that many of the people I knew when I was there have passed away already. Therefore I have written short essays on the Elder Layman Li Jing-Hwa and Cheng Tyan-Syi to inspire and encourage others by letting people know that merit and virtue created by people will never perish.

Layman Li Jing-Hwa and Layman Cheng Tyan-Shi were relatives. Since Li Jing-Hwa was a devout disciple of the Abbot, Great Master Chang Ren, Cheng Tyan-Syi also believed. Both of them had deep affinities with our monastery. For this reason I have written essays in commemoration of them. If they were still living, I wouldn't necessarily write about them. But if people have passed away and I think they are worthy of my writing an essay, I will write one. If they are not worthy of being written about, I will not write one. I am very practical.

The Elder Layman Cheng Tyan-Syi LIVED IN THE BACK PART OF SYING LUNG GOU VILLAGE. Whereas Li Jing-Hwa lived in the front part, he lived in the back part. IN HIS YOUTH HE WAS WILD AND UNTRAMMELED. This means he did not follow the rules. He ate, drank, and engaged in lust and gambling. Most people called him Cheng Number Three "Pointed Head." He liked to fool around with women. He had two wives. Later on, both women believed in the Buddha and became devout disciples. The second wife had a lot of faith in me.

HIS MOTHER DID NOT REMARRY AFTER HER HUSBAND DIED. She remained a widow. In his youth, Cheng was unruly. But after he got some sense in his head, he treated his mother with filial respect. LATER, WISHING TO REPAY THE KINDNESS OF HIS MOTHER, THE LAYMAN CHANGED FROM HIS DEVIANT WAYS AND RETURNED TO THE PROPER PATH. HE SERVED HIS MOTHER WITH FILIAL REGARD. HE DELIGHTED IN DOING GOOD WORKS and got involved in charitable causes. HE LIKED TO GIVE, BECAME A VEGETARIAN, AND TOOK REFUGE IN BUDDHISM.

HE JOINED THE PATH OF VIRTUE SOCIETY and people elected him the president of the headquarters at Harbin. He was president when I met him. He was called Virtuous Man Cheng. Previously he had been known as Evil Man Cheng, but later his name changed. He used to be "Pointed Head," but he changed into someone who was willing to take losses. In Buddhism, people have the opportunity to make monumental changes and start life anew.

Everything done by one in the past, becomes as if done by one
now dead;
Everything one will do in the future, will be as if done by one
born today.

After Cheng entered the Path of Virtue Society, HE ACTED AS A MODEL, AN EXEMPLAR IN CHARITABLE CONCERNS. He set a good example for others in pioneering humanitarian work. AND he also became A DEVOUT BUDDHIST AS WELL. HE WAS ABLE TO TEACH HIS SONS WELL; he had good methods for educating them. AND HE REGULATED HIS FAMILY WITH PRUDENCE AND WISE CONSIDERATION, to the point that he became wealthy. PEOPLE LOOKED UPON HIM WITH ADMIRATION. Since he was wealthy and had a good heart, HE WAS ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE PATH OF VIRTUE SOCIETY, located in the southern part of Harbin.

A VERSE IN PRAISE SAYS:

AT BIRTH, PEOPLE'S NATURE IS BASICALLY GOOD.
YET, DEFILED BY HABITS, WHAT IS WHOLESOME
BECOMES TARNISHED.
AS A WIDOW, THE MOTHER TAUGHT HER SON TO
TREAD THE PROPER PATH.
HE RESOLVED TO BE FILIAL TO HIS MOTHER, AND
WAS PAINFULLY DETERMINED TO CHANGE HIS
FAULTS.
DEVOTED TO THE PUBLIC GOOD, HE BENEFITTED
SOCIETY.
EARNESTLY BELIEVING IN THE BUDDHA, HE
INFLUENCED THE PEOPLE OF CHINA.
LIKE A SHIP MADE OF CEDAR WAS HIS MORAL
FORTITUDE AND INCORRUPTIBLE CHARACTER.

ONE ON THE PATH OF VIRTUE STEERS THE BOAT OF
COMPASSION AND ASCENDS THE OTHER SHORE.

AT BIRTH, PEOPLE'S NATURE IS BASICALLY GOOD. People are innately good when they are first born. YET, DEFILED BY HABITS, WHAT IS WHOLESOME BECOMES TARNISHED. From repeated exposure to defilement, our good consciences get covered over and buried.

AS A WIDOW, THE MOTHER TAUGHT HER SON TO TREAD THE PROPER PATH. The layman's mother remained a widow and led her son on the right path. HE RESOLVED TO BE FILIAL TO HIS MOTHER, AND WAS PAINFULLY DETERMINED TO CHANGE HIS FAULTS. Before he understood, he was unruly. But once he understood, he changed his evil ways. He was resolved to be filial to his mother, and earnestly changed for the better.

DEVOTED TO THE PUBLIC GOOD, HE BENEFITTED SOCIETY. He was enthusiastic about performing work for the public good. EARNESTLY BELIEVING IN THE BUDDHA, HE INFLUENCED THE PEOPLE OF CHINA. Every day in the Path of Virtue Society, he lectured on virtue, benevolence, and righteousness, teaching living beings.

LIKE A SHIP OF CEDAR WAS HIS MORAL FORTITUDE AND INCORRUPTIBLE CHARACTER. To observe filial piety, to remain a widow--such things are not easy. They are likened to the strength of cedar, which can withstand the bitter cold of snow and ice. ONE ON THE PATH OF VIRTUE STEERS THE BOAT OF COMPASSION AND ASCENDS THE OTHER SHORE. The Path of Virtue Society was like a great boat of compassion. The layman created all kinds of merit in the good deeds he did and established a foundation that would allow beings to ascend to the other shore.