

Water-Mirror Turning Back the Tide of Destiny

Essays and Verses by the Venerable Tripitaka Master Hua

Hwang Da-Tye (Blacksmith Hwang)

黃打鐵匠

ESSAY:

THE BLACKSMITH WAS A NATIVE OF HUNAN PROVINCE DURING THE SUNG DYNASTY. HE HAD AN HONEST AND TOLERANT DISPOSITION. HE WAS GENEROUS AND DELIGHTED IN DOING GOOD. HE WAS ILLITERATE AND HE MADE HIS LIVING AS A BLACKSMITH.

ONE DAY A MONK CAME FOR ALMS-FOOD. HWANG MADE OFFERINGS TO HIM RESPECTFULLY. THE MONK SAID, "NOW THAT I HAVE RECEIVED YOUR OFFERING, I HAVE NOTHING WITH WHICH TO REPAY YOUR KINDNESS EXCEPT TO LEAVE YOU WITH THE FOLLOWING REMARK: RECITE AMITABHA BUDDHA'S NAME MORE!"

HWANG PRACTICED ACCORDING TO THAT TEACHING. EACH TIME HE HAMMERED, HE WOULD RECITE THE BUDDHA'S NAME ONCE. AFTER A LONG TIME, HIS PRACTICE ACHIEVED A UNITY OF PURPOSE: HE WAS RECITING THE BUDDHA'S NAME AND STRIKING IRON; STRIKING IRON AND RECITING THE BUDDHA'S NAME.

HE KNEW IN ADVANCE WHEN HIS TIME WOULD COME. AND HE BADE FAREWELL TO ALL HIS RELATIVES AND FRIENDS. HE BATHED, CHANGED HIS CLOTHES, AND SAID TO HIS WIFE: "I AM GOING OFF TO REBIRTH." THEN HE CAME BEFORE THE FURNACE, HELD UP HIS HAMMER, AND STRUCK THE IRON. HE REQUESTED THAT HIS NEIGHBOR WRITE OUT SOMETHING ON HIS BEHALF. THE VERSE SAID:

DING. DING. DONG. DONG.
LONG SMELTED AND REFINED INTO STEEL.
MY WORLDLY AFFINITIES HAVE COME TO AN END;
I AM GOING OFF TO THE WEST.

HAVING SAID THAT, HE STOOD UP AND PASSED AWAY. AT THAT MOMENT, A RARE FRAGRANCE FILLED THE ENTIRE ROOM. AND HEAVENLY MUSIC RESOUNDED IN THE SKY. EVERYONE HEARD IT AND COUNTLESS PEOPLE OF SYANG (HUNAN PROVINCE) WERE INFLUENCED TO SINCERELY CULTIVATE THE PURE LAND DHARMA DOOR.

A VERSE IN PRAISE SAYS,

CONCENTRATED, EVERYTHING IS EFFICACIOUS.
SCATTERED, ALL IS RUINED.
STRIKING IRON AND RECITING THE BUDDHA'S NAME
ON COUNTLESSLY MANY RECITATION BEADS.
AS TIME PASSED, HIS SKILL DEEPENED.
LOTUS FLOWERS SPREAD ALL OVER THE GROUND.

HE TOOK OFF FOR THE WEST HAVING BADE FAREWELL
TO RELATIVES AND FRIENDS.

ANOTHER VERSE SAYS,

THE THREE FACULTIES ARE PERVASIVELY COVERED AND
THE MULTITUDES OF POTENTIALS ARE GATHERED IN.
THE MYRIAD DHARMAS RETURN TO ONE:
SAVE LIVING BEINGS FROM CONFUSION.
RECITE AND YET NOT RECITE, TO "DING AND DONG."
HAMMER AND HAMMER AGAIN, TURNING OVER AND
ROLLIN TOWARDS THE WEST.
FROM SMELTING FOR A LONG TIME, IRON TURNS TO
STEEL, AND
HE BECAME A VESSEL OF THE WAY.
ETERNAL AND UNCHANGING, HE TRANSFORMED THE
BARBARIANS.
THE BLACKSMITH'S SKILL MATURED AND HE WAS BORN
IN THE LAND OF ULTIMATE BLISS.
EVERYONE CAN GET THERE; IT IS TRUE AND NOT FALSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE BLACKSMITH Hwang WAS A NATIVE OF HUNAN PROVINCE. He lived DURING THE SUNG DYNASTY. HE had a FAITHFUL, HONEST, AND TOLERANT DISPOSITION. Although he was not from a wealthy family, HE WAS very GENEROUS AND DELIGHTED IN DOING GOOD. HE WAS ILLITERATE AND MADE HIS LIVING AS A BLACKSMITH.

ONE DAY A MONK--a left-home person--CAME to his house FOR ALMS-FOOD. Blacksmith HWANG respectfully MADE OFFERINGS TO HIM. After the meal THE MONK SAID,"NOW THAT I HAVE RECEIVED YOUR OFFERING, I HAVE NOTHING WITH WHICH TO REPAY YOUR KINDNESS. Having received the donor's kindness, I have nothing to give you, EXCEPT TO LEAVE YOU WITH THE FOLLOWING REMARK as a gift:"You should RECITE the name of AMITABHA BUDDHA MORE!"

Blacksmith HWANG PRACTICED ACCORDING TO THAT TEACHING, to the instructions he was given. EACH TIME HE HAMMERED, HE WOULD RECITE THE BUDDHA'S NAME ONCE. AFTER A LONG TIME, HIS PRACTICE ACHIEVED A UNITY OF PURPOSE. As time went on, "his skill became proficient. HE WAS RECITING THE BUDDHA'S NAME AND STRIKING IRON. STRIKING IRON AND RECITING THE BUDDHA'S NAME. His skill reached a blended unity. He arrived at a state of samadhi in which one recites and yet does not recite; does not recite and yet recites. Because his skill was deep HE KNEW IN ADVANCE WHEN HIS TIME WOULD COME. Thereupon, HE BADE FAREWELL TO ALL HIS RELATIVES AND FRIENDS, BATHED, and CHANGED HIS CLOTHES. Then HE SAID TO HIS WIFE:"I AM GOING OFF TO REBIRTH now!"

THEN HE CAME BEFORE THE iron FURNACE, HELD UP HIS HAMMER, AND STRUCK THE IRON. Since he was illiterate HE REQUESTED THAT HIS NEIGHBOR WRITE OUT SOMETHING ON HIS BEHALF. He requested that a neighbor write down a verse on his behalf. THE VERSE SAID:

DING, DING, DONG, DONG.
LONG SMELTED AND REFINED INTO STEEL.
MY WORLDLY AFFINITIES HAVE COME TO AN END;
I AM GOING OFF TO THE WEST.

"Long smelted and refined into steel." He used striking iron as an analogy for the skill of reciting the Buddha's name. His skill was consummated and reached perfection. His resolve had become indestructible, like vajra. When all of his worldly affinities had ended, he was able to put down the myriad conditions and be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

HAVING SAID THAT, after he finished saying his verse, HE STOOD UP AND PASSED AWAY, he stood up and went off to rebirth.

Since ancient times there have been many public records of people's experiences of rebirth in the West. There were those who laid down and went off to rebirth, those who sat upright and left, and also those who stood up and left. Blacksmith Hwang was standing up when he left for rebirth.

There was Dharma Master Deng Yin-feng (鄧隱峰) of the Tang Dynasty who left in an even more interesting and wonderful way. He stood upside down with his head on the ground and his feet stretched out toward the sky! After he completed the stillness, no one could move his body. The monks in the monastery had no other recourse except to ask his younger sister, a bhikshuni, to help. The sister came before him and admonished him, "Brother, when you were alive you did not honor the rules. Now that you are dead, you still want to be reckless!" Then she gave him a gentle push, and Yin Feng's body fell to the ground. It was only then that the monks were able to give him a proper burial.

In general, if one is mindful of the Buddha and acquires genuine skill, one can be free from birth and death. When Blacksmith Hwang left, A RARE FRAGRANCE FILLED THE ENTIRE ROOM, AND HEAVENLY MUSIC RESOUNDED IN THE SKY. All these were auspicious portents. They were proof that Amitabha Buddha and the sagely assembly had come to welcome and guide him. All those who were present heard the heavenly music. AND COUNTLESS PEOPLE OF SYANG (HUNAN PROVINCE) WERE INFLUENCED TO SINCERELY CULTIVATE THE PURE LAND DHARMA DOOR. From then on, many people sincerely cultivated the Pure Land Dharma door.

A VERSE IN PRAISE SAYS: CONCENTRATED, EVERYTHING IS EFFICACIOUS; SCATTERED, ALL IS RUINED. This is referring to the Dharma door of reciting the Buddha's name. If you can focus your mind and not be distracted, then this method is very magical. If your thoughts are scattered and confused, then your efforts will not be able to reach a single unity of purpose. STRIKING IRON AND RECITING THE BUDDHA'S NAME ON COUNTLESSLY MANY RECITATION BEADS. Every time he struck iron with his hammer, he would recite the Buddha's name once. This was different from ordinary people who used recitation beads for counting because he ended up reciting the Buddha's name countless many times.

AS TIME PASSED, HIS SKILL DEEPENED. LOTUS FLOWERS SPREAD ALL OVER THE GROUND. Each time we recite the Buddha's name, our lotus in the Western Land grows a little bit bigger. Blacksmith Hwang had recited the Buddha's name a countless number of times, and so his lotus in the West spread out profusely.

HE TOOK OFF FOR THE WEST HAVING BADE FAREWELL TO RELATIVES AND FRIENDS. He knew the time of his death in advance. After he said goodbye to his kin and friends, he took off for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

ANOTHER VERSE SAYS: THE THREE FACULTIES ARE PERVASIVELY COVERED AND THE MULTITUDES OF POTENTIALS ARE GATHERED IN. The Dharma door of reciting the Buddha's name gathers in people of the three kinds of faculties: superior, average, and inferior. Without exception, this Dharma door takes across living beings of various potentials. THE MYRIAD DHARMAS RETURN TO ONE; SAVE LIVING BEINGS FROM CONFUSION. All Dharma doors can return to the Dharma door of reciting the Buddha's name. It can take living beings across so that they can leave the path of confusion.

RECITE AND YET NOT RECITE, TO "DING AND DONG." The blacksmith reached the state of reciting and yet not reciting, not reciting and yet reciting. HAMMER AND HAMMER AGAIN, TURNING OVER AND ROLLING TOWARDS THE WEST. After undergoing numerous hardships, a thousand hammerings and a hundred smeltings, his skill matured and he took off for the West.

FROM SMELTING FOR A LONG TIME, IRON TURNED TO STEEL, AND HE BECAME A VESSEL OF THE WAY. He became a carrier of the Way. ETERNAL AND UNCHANGING, HE TRANSFORMED THE BARBARIANS. Because he held firmly to a solid and unchanging mind, he influenced the people of Hunan to believe in the Buddha as well. During the Sung Dynasty, Hunan was considered barbarian territory.

THE BLACKSMITH'S SKILL MATURED AND HE WAS BORN IN THE LAND OF ULTIMATE BLISS. EVERYONE CAN GET THERE; IT IS TRUE AND NOT FALSE. If people diligently recite the Buddha's name, it is for certain they will be born in the Western Land. This Dharma door is real and actual. It is not false. If ten thousand people cultivate, ten thousand people will get there.