

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

## *An Investigation into Human Nature*

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### *The Element Earth*

It's said that from antiquity, everyone has to die. However, whether one's death is a significant one or not depends on the manner in which one dies. Mencius observed, "Do not allow a premature death or long life to cause you any double-mindedness. Await the unfolding of whatever will come by cultivating your personal character. This is the way to establish one's destiny." You shouldn't pay attention to how short or how long you will live. The only important thing is that you cultivate your body and mind while waiting for the appointment of heaven. This is the path of establishing your own destiny. If you can be considerate of others and not be concerned for yourself, then you have *yang* earth.

Lei Feng left the world his journal, which abounds with lofty aspirations. He said, "I wish to be like a thread in the entire fabric of society. I am but one person. But I want to devote this short life to the benefit of the people. I want to be like a candle, emitting every bit of light that I can muster. I want to be like the spring silkworm, spitting out every inch of silk that I can." He also wrote in his journal, "Towards the people, I want to be warm like the spring. Towards my fellow countrymen, I want to be earnest with a fervor as intense as the heat of the summer sun. Towards evil people, I want to be like the autumn wind blowing away fallen leaves. In terms of my own practice, I want to hide away as things do in winter. I want to reserve my energy and make good my practice."

Lei Feng was a soldier of low rank, but when he died, in 1963, the country's leaders praised him as a model for society. Through his example, people became aware of the needy members of society.

The power of *yang* earth is that it can transform and exercise tolerance. True faith means one works for the welfare of the people, and is not out to make a name for oneself. Lau Dz said, "Those who are greatly wise act as if they were stupid. Those who are greatly adroit act as if they were clumsy. Truly wise people appear awkward in their speech." He also said, "True words are not pretty; pretty words are not true." If people flatter you, then their intent is not to help you. Yet if they speak words that are harsh but true, then they are helping you. If you become happy when people flatter you, and displeased when people bring up your faults, then the earth in your nature is *yin*.

Lau Dz, in the essay, *On Petition and Response*(感應篇), says, "With earnest request, there's bound to be a response." If you are truly sincere towards others, they will respond. It's like ringing a bell. Ring it vigorously, and you will get a loud sound. Ring it gently, and you will get a soft sound. If you don't ring it at all, you won't get any sound. If you

respect others, others will respect you. You have to move people with your sincerity. There must be actual practice for there to be results. For example, if you have one hundred acres, and you are only harvesting twenty acres worth, you cannot blame it on external circumstances. The problem is that you have not cooperated with heaven and earth. If you can cooperate with heaven and earth and maintain true faith, then you will be successful in everything you do.

There are many kinds of soil, just as there are many kinds of earth types. Some soils are fertile, soft and loose, which allows vegetation to grow in them. Some soils are dry and dusty; some soils are mixed with sand and gravel; some soils are hard as rock and barren. By the same token, if you are flexible, honest and generous, you are like loose earth that can absorb the sunlight and the energies of heaven and earth and let the myriad things grow. If you are hard and unyielding, and you like to gripe or worry, and you aren't warm towards other people, then you cannot nourish anything. *Yin* earth people cannot fulfill their filial duties. We have the expression, "Intractable wives and insubordinate sons," which refers to *yin* earth types.

If a child has *yin* earth in his nature, even if you hit him, he will refuse to budge. He will sit on the floor and whimper, and you won't even have a way to humor him. *Yin* earth people are dull and stubborn. All their lives they are bogged down. When they are told to do things a certain way, they will insist on another way of doing them. They harbor resentment, even though they may not express it. Since resentment damages the spleen, these people develop gastric disorders, ulcers, or stomach illnesses. If they wish to recover from such illnesses, they must turn the *yin* over to the *yang*.

In Manchuria, there is a kind of acidic earth, which is so hard and barren that nothing grows in it. This is analogous to faith that is not coupled with practice, and so no fruit is produced. In the event of such a situation, the crust of the earth must be removed and the earth ploughed. This is like tearing away the crust of one's hardened personality so that one's offenses can be exposed. Once they have been exposed, one is free of them, and then one can turn the *yin* earth into *yang* earth. In Manchuria, they cover acidic earth with limestone and then turn it over. Once the texture of the earth has transformed, vegetation can begin to grow from it. *Yang* earth people place themselves below everyone else. They are kind, forgiving, and big hearted.

If you wish to nourish the earth in your nature so it becomes *yang*, you must fulfill your filial duty. One example of great filiality is the young girl, Ti Rung ( 緹縈 ), who lived during the Eastern Han Dynasty. Her father, Chun Yu-yi ( 淳于意 ) was falsely accused and sentenced to a very cruel corporeal punishment. Ti Rung submitted a petition to the Emperor, pointing out that such an inhumane punishment was not something that elderly people could go through. She volunteered to stand in for her father, by being sold as a maid to a government official, so as to pay for her father's alleged offenses. The letter was presented to the Emperor Wen Di ( 漢文帝, ruled 179-156 B.C.), who himself was a greatly filial son. When he read the petition, he was deeply moved. He immediately pardoned Ti Rung's father, and simultaneously abolished that kind of corporeal punishment forever. Ti Rung's filial gesture was so sincere that it moved Heaven to intervene and come to her aid.

Another greatly filial daughter was Hua Mu-lan (花木蘭). The country was at war and short of troops, and so her father was drafted into the army. Mu Lan could not bear to see her aged father go to war. Since there was no male child in the family to take the father's place, Mu Lan dressed up as a man and went to war on her father's behalf. She stayed in the army for twelve years, and nobody knew she was a woman during all that time. For a woman to remain on the battlefield for twelve years without losing her chastity was a remarkable feat in itself. Later, her military achievements were cited by the Emperor. Only then did her fellow soldiers realize she was a woman!

Unfilial people are deficient in *yang* earth. If your character lacks the earth component, things will not go smoothly for you. Such a deficiency can be remedied through the practice of filial conduct. Earth is related to the precept against lying. This means not speaking falsely, not even expediently, and not making little excuses for yourself. For example, say you bought something for five dollars and then gave it to someone. When that person offers to reimburse you, you blurt out, "Oh, forget it. It was only seven or eight dollars--not a big amount!" Although you had not meant to cheat, nonetheless your words were not honest. Just that slight exaggeration has detracted from your credibility.

Another example is when a mother says to her crying child, "Now, now stop crying. If you stop crying, I will buy you such and such a thing." But in the end, the mother does not keep her promise. Even though it was only a small lie, small lies are the beginnings of big ones. If you tell small lies every day, eventually they will add up. Therefore, any form of exaggeration is untruthful speech and constitutes a breach against true speech.

Ju Ge-lyang (諸葛亮) of the Three Kingdoms Period (222-265 A.D.), was a very trustworthy man. He was known for his caution and carefulness. He never took unnecessary risks, and he also never lied. One time, he was caught in a bind, and was forced to resort to the trick of the "empty city"(空城計) to repel the enemy. The reason why his strategy worked was because he had proven to be such an honest man.

This time, Ju Ge-lyang was stationed at a place called Syi Cheng(西城), with only 2,500 men. Suddenly news came that Sz Ma-yi(司馬懿), Commander of the State of Wei, was heading towards Syi Cheng with 150,000 men. All the military officers of Shu were alarmed by the news. But Ju Ge-lyang knew how to tackle the situation. He issued orders for the war banners to be taken down. All four gates to the City were flung open wide. At each gate, twenty soldiers, dressed up as common citizens, took to sweeping and cleaning the streets. After the stage was set, Ju Ge-lyang, accompanied by two young attendants, took his zither and climbed up to the citadel above the main gate. There, he lit incense and started to play on his zither.