

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

*An Investigation into Human Nature  
by Elder Upasika Men*

## *Wood Generates Fire*

Wood is related to humaneness, kindness and compassion. The wood of humaneness can generate the fire of clarity. Someone with a "wood generates fire" personality is clearheaded, bright and understanding. In the cycle for men, wood is the leader among the five elements. Now I would like to bring up three famous characters from the Three Kingdoms Period (A.D. 222-265) in China. Although they swore to be blood brothers, Lyu Bei (劉備), Gwan Yu (關羽) and Jang Fei (張飛) each had a very different personality. By studying their characters and their interpersonal relationships, we can gain a better understanding of the five elements.

1) General Gwan Yu was a typical example of a "wood generates fire, fire generates earth" personality. From his intensive study of the Spring and Autumn Annals, the historical chronicles of the state of Lu compiled by Confucius in the sixth century B.C., he developed a profound sense of justice. From humane "wood", he brought forth bright "fire." He was open-minded and righteous. One time in battle, his arm was injured by a poisonous arrow. The master physician Hwa Two (華佗) was brought in to see him. Hwa Two took a look at the arm and said, "I'll have to perform surgery. The lethal poison has entered deeply into the bone and marrow. I'll have to make an incision and scrape the bone. It's a painful process, so someone will have to tie you up."

General Gwan laughed and said, "No, I don't need to be tied up!" Thereupon he stretched out his arm, and allowed the physician to start operating on it. Hwa Two removed the outer skin and used a sharp scalpel to scrape off the poison. The sound of the metal instrument scraping the bone could clearly be heard. General Gwan's attendants could not even bear to look at the operation, but he was eating and drinking as if nothing were going on. With his other hand he played a game of chess with one of his subordinates, Ma Lyang (馬良). Throughout the entire ordeal, he did not reveal a trace of pain or discomfort. He remained composed and aloof. Why was this man so brave? Because he had yang wood that helped him stand firm in the face of adversity. He was fearless. If it had been someone who had "fire overcoming metal," then he would not have been able to stand firm. He would have resorted to deception in Gwan Yu's situation. Wood gave rise to fire; and fire gave rise to earth. Earth is associated with honesty and faith. He was known for his honesty and sense of fairness. He never lied.

2) General Jang Fei also had fire in his nature; but it was the fire of violence, resembling a lightning bolt. Whenever he got angry, Jang Fei had his soldiers whipped. In the end his own men murdered him. They could not take his cruel flogging, and so they cut off

his head when he fell asleep. Whereas Jang Fei's fire was yin fire, Gwan Yu had yang fire. He understood propriety and ethics.

3)Lyu Bei was a combination of wood, metal, and water, with water being the predominant element. Water (gentleness) generates wood. Starting with gentleness, one goes on to stand firm. Lyu Bei also had metal in his character. Metal is associated with primal emotion, and so Lyu Bei was a sentimental fellow. Once he called on the state of Dung Wu (東吳). The ruler Sun Chywan, detecting Lyu Bei's weakness, plied him with beautiful women, good food, and all kinds of sensual pleasures. Lyu Bei was too happy to think of home. He forgot his own kingdom, Shu. However, he had a brilliant prime minister, Ju-ge Lyang, (諸葛亮) who knew him well. Foreseeing the difficulty ahead, Ju-ge Lyang gave three pouches to General Jau Yun (趙雲), the personal escort of Lyu Bei, before they headed for the state of Dung Wu. The pouches were to be opened at certain critical times. Each one of them contained instructions on how to tackle the situation at hand. Because Ju-ge Lyang had this foresight, Jau Yun was finally able to escort his lord Lyu Bei back to his own country.

Because Lyu Bei had water and metal in his nature, he found it hard to part with women. When he arrived at Dung Wu, he was given the hand of the Princess of Wu in marriage. He was so infatuated with his new wife that he couldn't bear to leave her. On many occasions, it was recorded that he wept. He cried to his wife. He also cried when his son Ah Dou (阿斗) was rescued by the brave general Jau Yun. On his deathbed, when he entrusted the care of his young son, the crown prince, to Ju-ge Lyang, Lyu Bei also wept bitter tears. These were evidences of his sentimental nature--the metal-water combination. General Gwan Yu, on the other hand, had yang wood and yang fire, and so he had no hankering for women or wealth. He was not sentimental like Lyu Bei. He could stand firm and was dauntless in battle.

Analysis of the three historical personages can shed some light on the workings of the five elements.

### *Fire Generates Earth*

In the above section, we have discussed "Wood generates fire." Now we will take it one step further, and go on to discuss how "fire generates earth." A year is broken up into four seasons, and each season is associated with a certain element.

spring--wood  
summer--fire  
autumn--metal  
winter--water

Earth, on the other hand, is associated with all four seasons.

Human life is also divided into four stages. From infancy to age twenty, we are in the spring of our lives. During this period before our blood and energy are settled, we should

restrain ourselves in the area of carnal indulgence. From age twenty to forty, one is in the prime, or summer, of one's life. One's blood and energy are full and robust, and therefore one has to restrain oneself in the area of contentiousness. When we are full-blooded and strong, we tend to want to fight. Therefore, we have to be especially watchful over this tendency to fight.

From age forty to sixty, one enters the fall of one's life. And from age sixty to eighty, one enters the winter of one's life. Our energy dissipates in old age. During this time we should guard against the desire to accumulate a lot. Old people have the tendency to hoard.

The springtime of our life is for studying the Way. Summer is the time for practicing the Way. Autumn is the time for accomplishing the Way. And winter is the time for bringing the Way to final completion.

Within a year each season takes up seventy-two days. At the end of each season, there is an eighteen-day period assigned to earth. Therefore, earth is prevalent throughout all four seasons. Earth nourishes the myriad things.

When one has the personality of "fire generates earth," he is clear and understanding. With yang fire he clearly recognizes the laws of cause and effect. Further, he has honesty and faith (earth). Virtuous Man Wang was illiterate. How was he able to become enlightened to the Path? He had "sincerity" (誠). Whenever he heard about the lofty conduct of the ancient sages, he was determined to be just like them. He had that, kind of earnest faith and trust. His cousin Li Dz-he (李子和) was a coal miner. Once Li asked Wang, "Why is it that I am a poor coal miner? In what way should I practice the Path?"

Virtuous Man Wang replied, "Your mother was a second wife. Your father married her after his first wife died. However, your mother did not treat your elder brother (son of the first wife) well. She failed in her duty as a mother. This has led to your present predicament. You are suffering the repercussions of your mother's mistakes. Therefore, if you wish to make amends for your mother, you should treat your elder brother especially well."

After Li Dz-he understood the principles of cause and effect at work, he yielded half of his share of the family property to his elder brother. His elder brother liked to gamble. Once, when he lost a bet and couldn't come up with the money, he was put in jail. Li Dz-he sold his property and gave the money all to his brother. He did this thrice. Finally, he left his household to follow Virtuous Man Wang. The pair of them traveled up and down Manchuria, propagating the principles of the Path. Eventually, Li had some kind of awakening. He could see the reasons for people's illnesses, and heal them. He was called "Virtuous Man Li."

