

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

An Investigation into Human Nature

by Elder Upasika Men

Fire Generates Earth

continued from last issue

Virtuous Man Wang was determined to help the stupid become wise; he was determined to help intelligent people become sages. He began by exhausting the potential of his own nature. Then he went on to exhaust the potential of other people's natures, as well as the natures of animals and of things. In this way he could assist the transforming and nourishing powers of heaven and earth.

What is meant by giving full development to the nature of animals and things? I will illustrate this with one example from the life of Virtuous Man Wang. In his youth he was a cowherd. He discovered that cows had yin fire in their nature. They were stupid and stubborn because of this yin fire. If cows manage to transform and purify their yin fire, they will be able to leave their cow bodies and get out of the animal realm.

There was a farmer in his village who loved his cow. The farmer often talked to his cow, and the cow gradually understood the human language. This farmer liked his cow so much that he braided the cow's hair and tied it with a bright red ribbon.

One day the county magistrate came to the village to survey the people's livelihoods. On the road he saw the cow with a bright red ribbon on its head. He motioned his carriage to stop, called the farmer to him, and questioned him: "What kind of perverse citizen are you, that you should braid the hair of your cow?"

The farmer got down on his knees and said, "I am a law-abiding citizen. My cow understands human language. I braided her hair because I am so fond of her."

"Oh? How can you prove that your cow understands human speech? Tell her to make way for me."

The farmer called out, "Blackie! The magistrate has come. Now you quickly get out of the way to let him pass!"

The cow obeyed the order and quickly jumped over the ditch. The magistrate was pleasantly surprised by what he saw. He made a present of several silver pieces to the farmer and told him to work in his fields.

When news of this story reached Virtuous Man Wang, he made a special trip to see Blackie. He asked the farmer how he taught his cow. Thereafter he adopted a similar method to teach his own cow. He came to understand the nature of cows. They have yin fire, which explains their stubbornness and stupidity. Virtuous Man Wang resolved to teach his cow. He wanted the cow to transform her yin fire, so she could leave the animal path and get out of suffering.

Some time later, the cow was stolen by bandits. Virtuous Man Wang ransomed it with seventy dollars. The cow was sent back. She worked in the fields for another two years, and then she was stolen again. At this point, Virtuous Man Wang said, "This cow should have died a long time ago. When she was stolen by the bandits, we ransomed her with seventy dollars. For that reason she had to work an extra two years for us, to pay back the debt. This time, if we were to ransom her, if we brought her back, she would have to work more years to pay back her debts. Isn't that inflicting more suffering upon the poor creature?"

Although Virtuous Man Wang did not make any attempt to ransom the cow, she escaped and came back on her own. Virtuous Man Wang observed, "The cow has settled her accounts. She has transformed her own nature. Next year it's time for her to go." And, true to the prophecy, the cow died the following year.

When a cow manages to transform its yin fire of stupidity, it can leave its cow body and be reborn as a person in its next life. On the other hand, people who have excessive yin fire might lose their human bodies and be reborn as cows.

To be able to bring to full development the natures of animals and of things can be ascribed to virtue. Although Virtuous Man Wang was an illiterate farmer, nonetheless, if he heard a single wholesome word or phrase, he made sure he put it into practice. He deeply investigated the nature of things until he gained a penetrating understanding of the laws of cause and effect. He opened up great wisdom. One time, a wealthy man wanted to make a donation of four hundred acres of land to the Path of Virtue Society. Virtuous Man Wang did not even bother to speak to the man. After the man departed, we were overcome with curiosity, and we asked Wang, "The Society could certainly use the land. Why didn't you accept that generous offer?"

Virtuous Man Wang replied, "The man's situation is as precarious as a mountain of eggs stacked one upon another. If we don't move the eggs around, the mountain will stand for at least a little longer. However, if we were to move some of the eggs around, the mountain would crumble at any time. His family is in grave, imminent danger. If we accept his land, he will shift his anger on us and blame us for his misfortune. He will say 'I performed good works and ended up with a disaster.' How could we accept such a donation? Now, why is his family in such a precarious situation? Because he operates a gambling casino. He is the leader. He always wins and never loses. He made all of his money through illegal and unethical means. It's the money of offenses, totally devoid of virtue."

We have the common saying, "The grandfather slaves and makes the money. The son inherits it. The grandson completely squanders it." This is describing families that do not foster virtue in the process of acquiring wealth. Therefore, it's not a hard and fast rule that you will obtain blessings if you give. Certain factors come into consideration, such as: Are you honest and sincere when you give? Are you able to completely renounce your money gained through unethical means?

People may not understand issues pertaining to virtue; however, the ghosts and spirits know. Confucius said, "Become one with the ghosts and spirits who send blessings or misfortune." Mr.Chang Ya-sywan (張雅軒) of the Path of Virtue Society renounced his entire fortune to set up free schools. At the end of the first two years, both of his young sons died. Later, another son was born to him, and the boy was given the name Chang Ren-shen(張潤身). After old Mr.Chang died, his son suddenly became insane. The doctors could not cure him. Somebody suggested they consult the Fox Spirit Number Nine (狐九大爺). Who was Fox Spirit Number Nine? When the first emperor of the Manchu Dynasty entered the mainland from Manchuria, he solicited the protection of nine fox spirits. After he ascended the throne, he granted them official titles. The fox spirit charged with the care of Shen Yang (瀋陽) was number nine,hence the reason for his title.

Gau Jeng-wu (高正午), the acting director of the Path of Virtue Society, went to consult this fox spirit.The fox spirit took possession of a young man and spoke through him, revealing the reason for the sickness of Mr.Chang's son: it turned out that the cemetery of Mr.Chang belonged to a red python spirit (紅蟒都督). On the day of the burial, someone did see a red snake slither right by his feet. The python was protecting its territory, which had been taken over without its permission. Because Chang Ya-sywan had magnanimous virtue, the python spirit could not do anything to his grave. However, he came to bother Mr.Chang's son, causing him to become insane.

Having discovered the reason for the illness, Director Gau erected a shrine at the back of the grave, dedicated to "Commander Red Python." Shortly thereafter Mr.Chang's son recovered from his illness.

The states of ghosts and spirits is unfathomable and inconceivable. In the Book of Odes it said,"The working of the spirits cannot be surmised—can you treat them with indifference?" Confucius also remarked, "How splendidly do the spirits and ghosts exercise their powers! We look for them, and cannot see them. We listen, but cannot hear them. They enter into all things, and without them there is nothing."

Even so, if people have adequate virtue, they can win the respect and protection of the ghosts and spirits. Whenever Virtuous Man Wang came upon a certain phenomenon, he would deeply investigate its workings until he obtained a clear understanding of its nature. This intensive investigation calls for casting out the selfish desire for material things. Only if we cast out our selfish desire for things, can we gain an intuitive understanding of the nature of all things. Virtuous Man Wang had wood, fire, earth, and metal in his personality. He was trusting and honest, which means he had plenty of earth. He always

looked for people's strong points, which was a case of "earth generating metal." He admitted his own mistakes, which was "metal generating water." It's said,

By admitting our own mistakes, we close the gates of hell.

By looking for other's good points, we open the road to heaven.

If you can go one step further, you will even reach the Buddha's realm!

Therefore, I repeatedly urge all of you to look for blessings disguised in adversity. When you give up all of your worries and impediments, you will leap out of the confines of your fate. Virtuous Man Wang often reminded us of this simple advice, "You want just a little money, a small house, and a very, very good heart." He also said, "Not fighting and not being greedy, one enjoys infinite blessings and prosperity. Fighting, being greedy, and scheming, one creates boundless offenses."

If you can put yourself below everyone else, the group will cherish you. If you want to be on the top of everyone, they will all hate you, and nit-pick at your faults. The Sixth Patriarch Master Hwei Neng (六祖慧能大師) of the Chan School was an illiterate. He became enlightened to the Way when he was pounding rice. Only when we put ourselves below others, reach down and connect with the ultimate depths of our souls, can we perceive our nature as it really is. People who are arrogant and full of them-selves become brittle and hard; they pursue the path of death. On the other hand, people who remain receptive, open, gentle and yielding walk the path of birth. You should bring forth warmth in your heart at all times. That is the essence of "wood generating fire, and fire generating earth."