

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

An Investigation into Human Nature

by Elder Upasika Men

The Story of Top Scholar Ju

Ju Shun-tyan (朱循天) was a native of Tai An County, Lyou Ning Province, Manchuria. He was the third son of Mr. Ju Shu-chen (朱恕忱), member of the school board of trustees of the Path of Virtue Society. As a student, he used to attend the conferences of the Society. One time he heard Li Dz-he (李子和) talk about how, on three occasions, he yielded all of his wealth to his older brother. Ju Shun-tyan was deeply moved by the example and resolved that in the future he would do the same. Afterward, he wanted to yield his share of the family property to his two elder brothers, who were the sons of his father's first wife. Shun-tyan was engaged to Jin De-jen (金德貞), a school teacher. At first, Jin agreed to his decision to yield the family wealth, but later on she changed her mind. Under her parents' influence, she demanded that her fiance claim his share of the wealth. She was not going to marry some penniless fellow.

However, Shun-tyan was quite determined. He was not going to compromise his original promise. After Shun-tyan graduated from teachers' college, Ms. Jin demanded that he first divide the family property with his brothers and set up a different household before they got married. However, Shun-tyan insisted that they first get married and then work things out later. After the ceremony, on their wedding night, Ms. Jin made a big scene about splitting up the family fortune. There was strife and quarreling, but Shun-tyan stood firm. He said, "Once the superior person has made a promise, even a carriage with four horses won't be able to overtake it." Enraged, Ms. Jin stormed out of the house and returned to her mother's house.

At this point, Virtuous Man Wang comforted Shun-tyan and gave him the following instructions, "As for people of pure will, the more adversity they encounter, the happier they get. Parents are the root of a household. Your refusal to divide up the family property and also your plan to set up a trust fund for your mother with your own earnings are acts of making the roots solid and firm. Once your roots are firmly planted, in the future you can also set up a trust fund for your wife. You will then have fulfilled your moral obligations. It is said that a husband should abide by three firm principles: (1) By not giving into anger, but by following the duties of your heavenly nature instead, you are treading the path of sages and worthies. That is the strength of the nature. (2) By not giving rise to selfish desire, you have gained the strength of the mind. (3) By not indulging in unwholesome habits, but by making yourself a model, you have gained the strength of the body. When a man stands firm in all those three aspects -- his nature, mind and body -- he can guide his wife on the path of moral principle. This does not mean that you may boss her around. Ms. Jin is helping you from the reverse. Therefore, you should not hold it against her."

Virtuous Man Wang suggested that Shun-tyan go teach at An Da (安達) County. After setting up trust funds for both his mother and his wife, he also bought 500 acres of land with his own earnings, hoping that this would fulfill his wife's desire for money and property. However, Ms. Jin had her eyes on the

land of the Ju household, and she was not about to give it up. Shun-tyan patiently weathered the test without complaining. For six years, the couple did not see or write to each other.

At the end of the six years, Virtuous Man Wang said to Shun-tyan, "You have already fulfilled your part of the duty. Now you should go home and try to influence your wife to change. If she agrees to cultivate the Path, she should set up trust funds for both your sisters-in-law, and then she will fulfill her part of the moral duty as a wife. Why is this? Because there is a knot of resentment in your family. Once, while your father was handling his gun, he accidentally fired it and killed his first wife. She was the mother of your two elder brothers. If you or your wife are able to make provisions for your brothers and sister-in-law, then you will atone for your father's offenses, and the tie of resentment will be dissolved. However, if Ms. Jin insists on having a divorce, you should try to talk things over with her three more times. Since there are five basic moral obligations, all in all you should exhort her five times. Then you would have done your share of the duty. If she still refuses to comply, then you can go ahead with the divorce."

The year following that, Shun-tyan went to Ms. Jin's house five times in a row. Each time she snubbed him and refused to talk to him. One time a dog bit Shun-tyan's clothes and tore his robe. Ms. Jin made a sarcastic remark in the house, "From where has this beggar come? Even the dog bit him!" But Shun-tyan never got angry, despite the verbal humiliation.

By the sixth time around, Shun-tyan said to his wife, "If you truly insist on it, I guess I have no choice but to let you go ahead with the divorce." Ms. Jin was delighted. Immediately she ordered food and wine to be brought out and treated her husband to a meal. Then they signed the divorce documents. When Shun-tyan stepped out, of the door, Ms. Jin personally saw him off, walking with him quite a ways down the road.

When the story was reported to Virtuous Man Wang, he said to Shun-tyan, "That Ms. Jin personally saw you off shows that she still has a certain sentimental attachment toward you. Although your conditions with each other have terminated, you should wait until she remarries before you yourself remarry. Then you will truly have fulfilled your obligations to her. In addition, when you remarry, your new wife should set up trust funds for your two sisters-in-law. That way she will make up for what Ms. Jin failed to do. Ms. Jin was always teaching outside the family; she never fulfilled her filial duty. If you are able to fulfill these various aspects of your moral obligation, then you can be said to be someone who is truly righteous and fair."

Virtuous Man Wang proceeded to explain the underlying cause and effect at work in that family situation: "Your mother was a second wife. She came to the Ju house after the first wife died. However, she did not do a good job of raising your two elder brothers. Therefore, she was deficient in her moral obligation toward the first wife. The spirit of the first wife retained her unmitigated grievance. That is the reason why Ms. Jin came to your household. Her role was to avenge the cruel death of the first wife and to bring ruin to the Ju family. Since you have generously helped Ms. Jin, you have perfected your spirit of righteousness. If she is unable to accept your good intentions, the fault lies with her, not with you."

After Ms. Jin remarried, Shun-tyan made a public announcement while teaching at the Path of Virtue Society headquarters at Lyou Ning. He said, "If there is someone who is willing to setup trust funds for my two sisters-in-law, I will be happy to consider marriage with her."

The head of the Virtue Department, Ms. Lyu Syiu-chin, offered \$1,000 to each of the two sisters-in-law to help them set up trust funds. She also set up another trust fund with \$1,000 for herself. That meant she would never have to rely on her husband's money. The interest generated from the trust fund

would provide her with ample living expenses. This was the kind of egalitarian marriage set-up advocated by Virtuous Man Wang for "modern couples" at that time. The marriage was without the traditional kinds of fanfare, such as gifts, dowry, congratulations and so forth. Modesty and thrift were the main thrust. After the Ju's got married, they adhered to a simple and modest way of life. Both husband and wife were dedicated to serving the community and teaching people to go toward the good.

After Ms. Lyu entered the Ju family, she brought about a tremendous change. As a wife and daughter-in-law par excellence, she inspired everyone to be cheerful and mutually considerate. Someone asked Virtuous Man Wang, "Why did Ms. Lyu have to set up trust funds for her two sisters-in-law? Couldn't Shun-tyan, her husband, have done the same?"

"The difference is subtle, yet pertinent," was the reply. "If Shun-tyan were to set up trust funds, he could only atone for his father's sin. But if Ms. Lyu set up the trust funds, she would be able to take the wronged soul of the first wife across. It was the wife's job, not the husband's, to dissolve that tie of resentment."

That is the story of Ju Shun-tyan. Undaunted by adversity, he persevered with his original intentions. In the process, he managed to transform his own character and establish moral fortitude. He did not give in to the repeated suggestions of Ms. Jin to divide up the family property, but he did not get angry at her either. Because Ju stood firm in three aspects—his nature, mind and body—Virtuous Man Wang called him "Foremost Mr. Ju."

It is said, "Man models himself after heaven. Woman models herself after earth. The children model themselves after people in the human realm." This takes into account all three realms -- heaven, earth and the human realm. Therefore, it is essential that man stand firm in his position and hold to his principles. This does not mean he oppresses women or bosses them around. It means he has to be an exemplar of correct conduct. For his wife and his children, he serves as yang energy.

One time someone asked Virtuous Man Wang, "What is meant by virtue?"

"If your children are stronger and better than you, then you have virtue," was the reply.

"In what way should one establish virtue?"

"For every ten dollars you earn, give six of it to charity. That way your children will most certainly excel, because you are nourishing your virtue by doing good deeds. However, say you make ten dollars and you are still dissatisfied and you try all sorts of tricks to make an extra twenty dollars so you can spend it on food, drink and partying, you will end up spoiling your children rotten. You will be deficient in your virtue because you have not taught them well. You will not have fulfilled your duty as a parent."

Therefore, it is not enough that we have money. We must know how to use it properly. "If you know how to use your wealth, you will transcend the three realms. If you do not know how to use your wealth, you will not escape creating offenses."