

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

An Investigation into Human Nature

by Elder Upasika Men Yi-ping

The Element Earth

As Sz-ma Yi approached the City wall, he saw Ju-ge Lyang sitting on the ramparts of the City tower, strumming away on his zither, with not a care on his mind. The notes that emanated from the strings were resonant and perfect. They obviously came from a very collected and peaceful mind.

The twenty-odd citizens quietly swept the streets, as if nothing was going on. Sz-ma Yi was seized with doubt. He said, "Ju-ge Lyang is known for his caution. He never takes risks. Now the City gates are flung wide open. There must be troops lying in ambush for us. If I lead my men in, we will certainly fall into their trap!"

Sz-ma Yi was untrusting and given over to suspicion, while Ju-ge Lyang was trustworthy and faithful. Their characters emerged in stark contrast at this encounter. Finally, Sz-ma Yi's doubts overcame him, and he withdrew all of his troops. The soldiers left Syi Cheng quietly, and the city thus escaped unscathed. Ju-ge Lyang was able to use this clever device in repelling the enemy because he was honest. In his daily life, he never lied. Even his enemy respected him, and didn't suspect that Ju-ge Lyang had an empty, unprotected city on his hands, with only 2,500 men inside.

Among the five ethical relationships, earth is related to the bond between friends. Friends treat one another with trust and loyalty. Therefore, you don't want to brag when you talk. You don't want to praise someone sky-high when they do not deserve such praise. If you flatter others, you are also going against the code of trust. People with *yang* earth like to help others. They don't seek recompense, but consider helping others a joyous endeavour.

The worst kind of *yin* earth people are those who like to create schisms. For example, such a person goes to John and tells him bad things about Steve, and then he goes to Steve and tells him bad things about John. He manages to create a rift between those two friends, where originally there was none. This trouble-maker is guilty of uttering harsh speech and divisive speech. A *yin*-earth person may also casually criticize people or utter irresponsible speech. As a rule, he lacks faith and credibility. Not only does he not believe in the Buddha, he does not even believe in people. If you call yourself a believer in the Buddha, you must put into practice the Buddha's teachings. Only then can you plant seeds for Buddhahood. Otherwise you'll work your way into the hells. It's said, "Before your mind moves, the spirits know." Therefore, you should not give rise to even a single false thought, much less utter false speech.

* * *

Question: What's the difference between "credibility" (守信) and "faith" (信仰)

Answer: In the Confucian *Analects*, the following exchange was recorded:

Dz Gung asked about government. The Master said, "The requirements are that there be sufficiency of food, sufficiency of armed forces, and trust by the people in their rulers."

Dz Gung asked, "If it cannot be helped, and one of these must go, which of the three could be dispensed with first?"

The Master replied, "The armed forces."

Dz Gung pursued his question, "If it cannot be helped, and one of the remaining two must be foregone, which of them should be dispensed with?"

The Master replied, "Do away with the food. From of old, people have had to die. But if people have no faith in their rulers, the state cannot stand."

An old maxim says, "Gain credibility through your words." 言而有信 The character for "credibility" is made up of the "man" radical (人) and the word for "speech" (言). This means, in order to establish your trustworthiness, you have to be true to your word. You have to keep your promises. Your actions must match your words, and vice versa. Trust in the government is the life force of the people. If a government vacillates in its policies from day to day, the people will lose their trust. Without trust, a government cannot stand.

Mencius observed, "Good government inspires awe in the people. Wholesome teaching inspires veneration in the people." A government must use both those aspects to inspire awe and admiration in its people. Without solemn dignity, a government cannot establish a sound constitution. If a government does not cherish its people, the masses will not want to draw near it. To draw near the people means to truly care for the welfare of the people. This kind of beneficent government can move Heaven and Earth. The people of old sang the praises of the reign of the sagely Kings Yau and Shun 堯舜之治:

There was a gentle breeze every five days,
And a shower every ten — all was extremely auspicious.
Flowers bloomed in a thousand shades of purple and red --
It was spring the whole year round.

The mild and favorable weather could be ascribed to the humane policies of these sagely emperors. They never went back on their word. They always kept their promises. As a result, they were able to influence heaven and earth. The four seasons adhered to an orderly cycle. There were gentle winds and rains, the crops flourished in abundance, and the people thrived in peace and happiness.

"Credibility"(守信) is a result of honoring one's promises and making sure that one's words match one's deeds.

Now we will go on to discuss "faith" (信仰). Credibility and religious belief are both based on faith. Although the intentions appear to be different, the end result is the same. Faith usually refers to religious belief, or belief in the doctrines of a certain philosophy or teaching. However, if you profess faith in a certain religion, then you must investigate the principles of its teachings thoroughly and come to a genuine understanding of them. Only then can you profess true faith, and not blind faith. Jesus said, "Those who believe are saved." This kind of belief refers to unconditional faith, faith without doubt. It also implies true practice. Believing in the Buddha works in the same way. If you say you believe in Gwan Shr Yin Bodhisattva, you must bring forth a sincere heart and rely on the Bodhisattva to show you a clear way. Faith in the Confucian teachings works along the same lines. You must gain a thorough understanding of the Sage's principles, and then embody them in your actions. The tenets of all the world's great religions share the same universal truths. The teachings emit great light and shine through the ages, never dying out. This is because those teachings are based on eternal and unchanging truths.

The power of faith is tremendous. If you have true faith, you can spur yourself onward and never stop. From not stopping, the path will become everlasting, vast, and all-encompassing. These are all aspects of *yang* earth. It's said in *The Doctrine of the Mean*, "The earth shoulders the Hwa and Ywe Mountain Ranges, but does not feel their weight. The earth carries the rivers and seas without them leaking away." It shoulders the weight of all things, but never complains. That is the merit of the earth! That is the power of true faith!

Faith is the source of the myriad good acts, the mother of merit and virtue.
It nourishes all good roots.

If you have *yin* earth and you wish to turn it into *yang* earth, there are several things you can start to do.

- 1) Do not blame others; do not be resentful inside.
- 2) Get rid of your polluted thoughts; do not be greedy.
- 3) Nourish your credibility. Be truthful and honest, to the point of not uttering a single false word.

When you have developed *yang* earth in your personality, you will be able to nourish the ten thousand things.

END OF THE ELEMENT "EARTH"



"The elements circle and recircle in change that is changeless."