

Ancient Chinese Stories of Cultivation: The "Benevolent" Mr. Wang, a Buddhist Cultivator

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(Clearwisdom.net) Once upon a time in ancient China, there was a man whose surname was Wang. He was a kindhearted fellow, enthusiastic in helping people and devoted in Buddhist cultivation practice. He was commonly known as the "Benevolent Mr. Wang."

One day, the Benevolent Mr. Wang went to a Buddhist monastery and drew a stick from the divination lot in order to find out when he could reach Consummation. Then a monk told him, "You must pay your respects to Buddha every day by offering incense to Buddha every day. When you accumulate nine large cauldrons of ash from the burned incense, you may bring the ash to the West and present the ash to Buddha. Then you will definitely reach Consummation."

After he returned home, the Benevolent Mr. Wang followed the monk's words and sincerely offered Buddha incense every day. Finally, he accumulated nine large cauldrons of ash after a few years. Then he bought a donkey for the trip and took off. The donkey carried most of the ash on its back but the Benevolent Mr. Wang had to carry the rest on his back. At the end of the first day, the Benevolent Mr. Wang felt thirsty from the day's walking. Since it was getting dark, he began to look for lodging to spend the night when an elderly man suddenly showed up on the road to the West. The elderly man stopped him and asked, "Where are you from? What is your name? Why are both the donkey and you carrying such heavy sacks on your backs?" The

Benevolent Mr. Wang answered all of his questions. Then the elderly man told him, "Excellent. We are traveling towards the same direction. We must have a predestined relationship. I hate to impose, but I was wondering if you could kindly do me a favor?" Wang asked what he could help him with. The elderly man said, "I have walked a whole day and I cannot go on any longer. Could you please give me a ride on your donkey's back?" The Benevolent Mr. Wang hesitated for a minute, but he thought, "I should accumulate my virtue by doing charitable deeds. How can I not help the exhausted elderly man?" He then moved half of the ash from the donkey's back to make room for the elderly man and carried the ash on his own back. Thus the elderly man got on the donkey and the two of them started traveling together.

Once on the donkey's back, the elderly man seemed to feel better. He asked the Benevolent Mr. Wang again, "Oh, where did you say you were going? I must be old and senile. I cannot remember anything!" The Benevolent Mr. Wang patiently told the elderly man again, "I am going to the West to pay my respects to the Living Buddha and show the sincerity of my cultivation in Buddhism." The elderly man said, "Oh, now I understand." They found a lodge after dark and checked in. The Benevolent Mr. Wang started thinking to himself, "Now that the donkey is carrying such an elderly man on its back, the donkey is going to walk much more slowly and become more tired. When will I ever be able to meet Buddha? This will not do. I have to get up and leave early without the old fellow. I have to get rid of the excess baggage."

The Benevolent Mr. Wang quietly took off with his donkey at dawn. As he reached the entrance of the village, he saw the elderly man waiting for him at the side of the road. The elderly man stopped him again and called out to him, "Hey! The Benevolent Mr. Wang! What is the matter with you? I thought you were a kindhearted man. We are predestined to travel together. How can you abandon your traveling partner and take off without even saying goodbye? Fortunately I got up early and caught up with you in time. Come, come. Let me have a ride on your donkey!"

The Benevolent Mr. Wang could not bring himself to refuse the elderly man, so he had no choice but to move half of the ash from the donkey again and carry it on his back so that the elderly man could ride.

On the road the elderly man asked again, "Well! I am such an old fellow! I forget everything! I remembered asking you this question yesterday, but today I completely forget what you told me. Why are you going to the West?" The Benevolent Mr. Wang was running out of patience. He replied curtly, "To meet Buddha." After a while, the elderly man asked again, "Oh, I remember you are the Benevolent Mr. Wang, but I cannot remember why you are going to West. Could I trouble you to tell me again?" Anger began to build up in the Benevolent Mr. Wang, but he decided that he must not throw a tantrum at such an elderly and enthusiastic person, so he suppressed his rage and answered the question again.

Thus they walked from dawn to dusk and the elderly man must have asked the Benevolent Mr. Wang the same question a thousand times. The Benevolent Mr. Wang was ready to explode by the end of the day. Finally he endured an entire day. They found a lodge, had dinner and retired to bed. The Benevolent Mr. Wang thought to himself, "This time I must get up and leave early to get rid of this old fellow that brings me nothing but trouble!" He provided the donkey with hay and water. He waited until almost midnight and then took off in the middle of the night with his donkey and the large sacks of ash.

Never would he expect to see the old man when he reached the border of the village. The man called out to him, "The Benevolent Mr. Wang! The Benevolent Mr. Wang! You are called the Benevolent Mr. Wang, but why are you not doing benevolent deeds? You and I are traveling together to the West. I am an elderly man that cannot walk fast. Why did you abandon your conscience and leave without telling me? You took off earlier and earlier each day. How do you have the heart to abandon me?"

The Benevolent Mr. Wang had no choice but to suppress his rage and removed half of the ash from the donkey's back again to make room for the elderly man. Within minutes, the elderly man asked again, "The Benevolent Mr. Wang, you have been traveling day and night. Where are you going? Why on earth are you in such a hurry?" Upon hearing the repeated question again, the Benevolent Mr. Wang finally exploded. "Old man! You have no idea what I have suffered for you! I gave you a ride on my donkey, but I have been walking with a large sack of ash on my back! Do you have an idea how much I have suffered because of you? You do not appreciate what I have done for you! Instead, you asked me the same question over and over again! You are not tired of asking the same question, but I am exhausted from repeating the answer!" Then he said something really nasty: "Did a dog eat your conscience?!"

The elderly man got off the donkey's back with incredible ease. He pointed his finger at the Benevolent Mr. Wang and declared, "Go back home. There is no need for you to go to the West. The Living Buddha will not accept such a 'benevolent' cultivator that cultivates 'benevolence' in this manner." Upon saying these words, the elderly man levitated. He soared into the sky towards the west and then disappeared.

It was not until then that the Benevolent Mr. Wang realized that this elderly man was the Living Buddha! He collapsed to the ground and started slapping himself. He terribly regretted having missed the opportunity to achieve Consummation, but it was too late.

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