

# **Rewarded with Virtuous and Talented Offspring for Being Charitable, Benevolent and Altruistic**

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Fan Zhongyan (989 - 1052 A.D.), also known as Fan Xiwen, was a prominent politician and literary figure in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127 - 1279 A.D.) in China. His father passed away when he was young. He lived in poverty and could only afford to have congee with preserved vegetables every day. Yet poverty did not deter Fan Zhongyan's enthusiasm in studying. He studied very diligently and believed it was his own responsibility to bring good fortune to the Chinese people. He often told himself, "A learned man should worry for the world before everyone else begins to worry; he should live comfortably and happily only after everyone else has a comfortable and happy life."

One time, Fan went to a fortune teller for a reading. He asked, "Is there any chance I will become the prime minister?" The fortune teller replied, "It is hopeless." Fan asked, "Is there any chance I will become an excellent medical doctor?" The fortune teller replied, "Why did you have such a high aspiration a minute ago and then aspire to

be something much lower now?" Fan replied, "Only by becoming the prime minister or a medical doctor will I be able to save a lot of people." The fortune teller sighed and commented, "You have such a kind heart. You are indeed the right caliber for prime minister."

Fan Zhongyan studied diligently in a Buddhist temple for a period of time. While he was there, he discovered an urn of gold in the ground. Instead of taking it as his own, he put the urn back where it was and hid it in the ground again. Later he became the prime minister and told the monks to remove the gold to renovate the temple. Surprisingly, the gold disappeared from the urn. There was nothing but a piece of paper detailing Fan Zhongyan's resume as a government official and his salary. It turned out the sum of his salaries were identical to the value of the missing gold. Apparently the gold was a test on Fan from the gods and Fan had passed with flying colors.

After Fan Zhongyan won first place on the provincial civil service examination, he was appointed an imperial scholar at the imperial library. Fan excelled in the Six Classics. He patiently answered all the questions from the students. He even provided for impoverished scholars from all over China. Some of them were penniless when Fan Zhongyan started providing for them, but they forgot all about Fan as soon as they passed the civil service examination and left for their posts. Nevertheless, Fan Zhongyan never regretted helping these ungrateful people.

Fan Zhongyan enjoyed helping people in need. He gave financial help to impoverished relatives, including very distant relatives with talents. Shortly after Fan Zhongyan won first place on the provincial civil service examination, he made up his mind to give financial assistance to his entire clan if he was able to attain a high place in the future. In the first twenty years of his civil service, he didn't have enough money to fulfill his dream. After defending the border for years, he was finally transferred to the imperial court in the capital city and became the prime minister. Now that he became well off, he bought several thousand *mu* of rice paddies. [Note: *mu* is a Chinese land measure. One *mu* is equal to 733 1/2 square yards.] They were known as "charity paddies" that Fan Zhongyan used to provide for his impoverished relatives. Because of these charity paddies, everyone in his clan was free from hunger or lack of clothes. If someone in his clan needed money for his wedding or a funeral, Fan Zhongyan would give him money to cover the expenses.

He once bought a mansion in Jiangsu Province from a man named Qian. Before he moved there, a *fengshui* master told him that the location of the mansion had fantastic *fengshui* and that Fan Zhongyan's offspring would rise to high places in the government if he moved there. Fan Zhongyan replied, "In that case, I'd rather have people in Jiangsu attend school here so that they would all attain high places instead of

having only a single family enjoy prosperity." So he converted the mansion into a public school.

Fan Zhongyan's second son, Fan Chunren, also became a very famous prime minister in the Southern Song Dynasty. When Fan Zhongyan was working as a political advisor, he once had his son Chunren ship 500 buckets of wheat back to his hometown in Suzhou. During the trip, the boat made berth in Danyang, so Chunren took the opportunity to visit Shi Manqing, an old friend of Fan Zhongyan's. He quickly learned that destitution had hit Shi's family. Three of his family members had passed away, but he had no money for the funerals or plots. He had two daughters at the age suitable for marriage, but he had no money for their dowry. As soon as Chunren heard of Shi's plight, he gave 500 buckets of wheat to him as a gift. However, Shi continued to look depressed. He said, "It is not enough to solve my difficulty!" Next Chunren gave the boat to him as a gift. When Fan Zhongyan heard what his son had done, he was very pleased and repeatedly praised his son for doing the right thing. In the Qin Dynasty, Emperor Qianlong visited Tianping Mountain, Fan Zhongyan's old home, three times to pay him respect during his inspection tour of southern China. Emperor Qianlong also built "Lofty Loyalty Park" to praise Fan Zhongyan and his son's charitable deeds.

Although Fan Zhongyan later became Prime Minister and was very generous in giving financial assistance to other people, he had lived very frugally throughout his life to save

money for charity. After he became a high-level government official, only one of the dishes contained meat if there was no guest dining with him. He left his wife and children only enough money for food and clothes. After he completed his service as a military advisor, he was so poor that he didn't have anything but a horse. In order to travel to his next post, he had to sell the horse to come up with money for the travel. Later he accomplished some things in governing the border area, so the emperor rewarded him with a lot of gold and silver. However, he divided all the reward among his subordinates and left nothing for himself. Although Fan Zhongyan later became the prime minister, he led an extremely frugal life to save money for charity. When he passed away, his family was so poor that they didn't have money for the funeral or the plot.

Yet his four sons each attained very high places in the government. All of them lived by Fan Zhongyan's moral principles. As a result, Fan Zhongyan was blessed with very virtuous and talented grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Fan Zhongyan's decedents continued to be virtuous and highly accomplished for 800 years until the Qin Dynasty.