

Three Baby Swallows and Mr. Zhou's Three Sons

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There is a Chinese saying, "A fault confessed is half redressed." A story in a Chinese novel, *Sou Shen Hou Ji*, illustrates the principle behind this Chinese idiom.

Once upon a time, there was a literary man surnamed Zhou in the State of Pei. He had three sons in their early twenties. They appeared very healthy, but other than being able to utter some sounds, none of them could speak.

One day a man passed by Mr. Zhou's house and asked for a cup of water. He heard strange noises from inside the house, so he asked Mr. Zhou, "What is that noise?"

Mr. Zhou replied, "My sons. They cannot speak. They can only utter some sounds."

The man said, "Perhaps you should search inward and ask yourself why such a great misfortune had befallen your sons."

Mr. Zhou was amazed by the man's advice. He thought to himself, "This is by no means an ordinary man."

After a long while, Mr. Zhou came out and told the man, "I don't remember that I have done anything wrong."

The man said, "Why don't you try to recall things you have done in your childhood?"

Mr. Zhou entered his house again and thought hard about his childhood. After a long time, he came out and confessed to the man, "When I was very little, a swallow built a nest at the head of my bed. After the swallow hatched three eggs, she started flying out daily, hunting for food for her baby swallows. The baby swallows would open their big mouths and ate everything the mother swallow brought them. I watched the mother swallow feeding her babies every day. One day I put one of my fingers into the nest, and the baby swallows tried to eat my finger. I took three large thorny seeds and gave each baby swallow a thorny seed. They died shortly afterwards. When the mother swallow returned and saw her dead babies, she wailed sadly and flew away. To this day, every time I think of it, I still regret killing the three baby swallows."

After having heard his confession, the man turned into a Dao. He told Mr. Zhou, "Since you have confessed your crime, I will stop the punishment."

Suddenly Mr. Zhou's three sons could speak like normal people. Then the Dao disappeared into thin air.

It is truly admirable for a man to confess his faults once he finds them.

According to the Buddha school, when someone hits others or curses at others, he will ultimately be punished for his sins. Killing animals or human beings is an even greater sin. Mr. Zhou in the story created a terrible sin for himself by killing three innocent living beings, so he had to suffer for his sins. He paid back his sin by painfully watching his sons unable to speak for twenty years and finally by honestly confessing his childhood crime. It is true

that a fault confessed is half redressed. It is truly important for us to search inward for our faults and attachments when we encounter tribulations, and immediately correct them.