



*Traces of  
Previous Lives*

THE SUPREME MASTER CHING HAI

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(Wearing Vegan Fur)

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# *Biography of The Supreme Master Ching Hai*

The Supreme Master Ching Hai was born in Central Au Lac (Vietnam). At the age of eighteen, Master Ching Hai moved to England to study, and then later to France and then Germany, where She worked for the Red Cross and married a German physician. After two years of happy marriage, with Her husband's blessings, She left Her marriage in pursuit of enlightenment, thus fulfilling an ideal that had been with Her since Her childhood. This began a time of arduous pilgrimages to many different countries that ended only when She met a perfect living Master in the Himalayas. Master Ching Hai received the divine transmission of the inner Light and Sound, which She later called the Quan Yin Method. After a period of diligent practice, She attained Perfect Enlightenment.

To satisfy the longing of sincere Truth seekers, the Supreme Master Ching Hai offers the Quan Yin Method of meditation to people of all nationalities, religions and cultural backgrounds. Her message of love and peace brings spiritual liberation and hope to people throughout the world, reminding all to uphold Truth, Virtue, and Beauty in life.

Apart from setting a noble example, Supreme Master Ching Hai also encourages others to beautify the world through inspired creativity. Expressing Her inner joy through diverse media such as painting, poetry, jewelry and clothing designs, and musical compositions, Master Ching Hai seeks to enhance the outer as well as the inner beauty of all people with whom She comes in contact. Her artistic creations, displayed in exhibitions throughout the world, remind us of the inner spiritual realms. Her poems have served as a source of inspiration for many renowned composers, who have adapted the poems to music and performed the compositions to worldwide acclaim.

At a banquet honoring The Supreme Master Ching Hai in 1993, Mayor Frank F. Fasi of Honolulu, Hawaii, proclaimed: "The Supreme Master Ching Hai brings love to places around the world still plagued with hatred. She brings hope where there is despair, and She brings understanding where there is misunderstanding. She is the light of a great person, an angel of mercy for all of us."

# Foreword

*Traces of Previous Lives* recalls a time in the life of Supreme Master Ching Hai, a time filled with youthful love as well as a time that Her motherland was engaged in war. This collection of poems reflects that period of Her life in their expression of the sweet pain of romantic love as well as the suffering created by war. But even more than that, the Author's deep spiritual insight and compassion give every poem an uplifting quality.

The poems in the first part of the book reminisce about love. That first awakening of feelings for another besides one's parents is the most golden time in a person's life, and the memories never depart. To the Poet, the offering of this love is always innocent, pure and completely devoted. Such love is expressed freely, without a thought for its return:

*Last night,  
I had a beautiful dream.  
I heard footsteps  
And your sweet voice, humming!*  
(From "Dream")

Even the painful 'thorns' of love are part of its wondrous experience:

*Love is a blushing rose blossoming  
Gorgeous, radiant, but piercing!*  
(From "Love Is...")

No matter what the age of the reader, one is still transported to the world of exquisite yearning and bedazzled delight when experiencing through the Author's eyes:

*You have come, and I feel youthful once more,  
Like a twinkling star in this magnificent universe.*  
(From "Beside You")

But beyond the beauty of romantic love, these poems also speak to its underlying power. Love is the most motivating force in life; it brings new hope and softens the soul. Without love, life has no meaning. With love, any difficulty or obstruction can be overcome. And so it is that the personal love described so eloquently in *Traces of Previous Lives* is also a beacon, illuminating the heart's way to the more elevated love of compassion and selflessness.

The poems in the second part of *Traces of Previous Lives* reveal the suffering and separation caused by war. However, while deploring its tragedies, the Author praises the dedication and faithful loyalty of those who love and serve their country.

*Hats off to honor such spirit of devotion,  
Although in exile, you still display patriotic allegiance.*

(From "To Vinh Liem")

One who can endure hardship to protect and keep peace in one's country for the benefit of all must have an elevated soul. But so too, does the one who forsakes personal comfort to stand with others and uphold the noble principle of non-violence toward one's fellow beings.

*Together we march under the open sky,  
Despising tyranny, filled with sorrow for our motherland...*

(From "In Anguish over the Loss of One's Country")

Finally, it can be said that each poem in *Traces of Previous Lives* is an opportunity for an awakening. A poem of romantic love may stir the soul to realize its thirst for the highest true love, which is the universal love for all beings. A poem of war may cause the painful longing for true peace, which is the peace that comes from within. These awakenings are glimpses into the ideal world, and to aspire for this world means to embark on the greatest journey of all: the spiritual journey.




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\* Originally in Aulacese – Translated by the Author

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# Reflections on Supreme Master Ching Hai's Poetry

*By Poet Phung Minh Tien*

(Originally in Aulacese)

Writing poems is difficult; writing elegant poetry is even more difficult. Writing elegant poetry and at the same time conveying noble feelings, profound thoughts, a distant past, a tumultuous present, and a blissful future, is indeed infinitely more challenging.

Fortunately, in this century, we have been blessed with the marvelous union between talent and enlightenment in the poetry of Supreme Master Ching Hai. Her poems, assembled in such collections as *Wu Tzu Poems*, *Traces of Previous Lives*, *The Dream of a Butterfly*, *The Lost Memories*, and *The Old Time*, were composed on Her path to Self-discovery as She searched for the Truth. Through Her exaltation of the God Nature in all sentient beings, an immense world of liberation has been opened. She encourages humanity to break through binding attachments, earthly body's limitations and preconceived ignorance, so that the Self may soar to glorious realms.

The Poet has been described modestly as follows:

“Supreme Master Ching Hai was born in Au Lac. As a young adult, She went abroad to study. Later, She traveled to many countries and famous holy sites in search of the Truth. After a time of seclusion and practice in the Himalayas, She attained enlightenment.

At present, with infinite compassion, Supreme Master Ching Hai teaches the Quan Yin Method to sincere Truth-seekers.”

The Poet came of age in a war-torn country, where family love, romantic love, and even patriotic love had to be forsaken:

*My child, just follow the others;  
I can neither laugh nor cry at this moment!*

Every leave-taking is filled with sadness, because a safe and joyful place has to be abandoned for a seemingly vast and stormy unfamiliar world:

*You've gone to the end of the horizon,  
The world is vast, who knows if a return is ever to come?  
In the heart of a stormy ocean,  
I wonder what the tiny sea shell longs for?*

“A Farewell to My Child”  
From *Traces of Previous Lives*

In such immensity, human beings feel more than ever, that their insignificant and humble fate is overburdened with trials and tribulations, bound by so much yearning, hope, sorrow and separation:

*Who has stopped here long ago, then took off  
To thousands of stations, and hundreds of waters?...  
I'm so young and growing with hopes,  
Day after day, the foolish widow.*

*Will you return, or never come back?  
Am I forgotten? Or should I stop yearning?  
I wish to follow you on thousands of strange roads,  
Like silky moonlight – never ceases shining!...*

“Love Melody 2”  
From *The Lost Memories*

Displaced in a discontented world, She witnessed life's many vicissitudes: its faint hopes and desperate pursuits, awakened mornings and evanescent evenings. The more a person struggles, the more he or she is surrounded by futile obsessions and shattered dreams. All these troubles besiege the human fate, such that reveries turn into nightmares, and hope vanishes into thin air:

*There were days when tomorrow didn't want to arrive  
Wearily I waited throughout the night!  
My soul's lost in an endless nightmare,  
So much struggling, still I remained in the sea of suffering!  
Like a lone bird amidst a tempest  
Vast oceans could not contain all my sadness.*

Then what's left in this life? Perhaps a solitary silhouette on the road under the setting sun, a veil of forest mist looming ahead as the person looks back at a bygone childhood. And the present is like the torrential rain and freezing snow, echoing melancholy melodies.

*There were days when the sun didn't rise,  
Here I waited, but the future was not in sight.*

...

*And like that, the rain falls and leaves scatter  
Day after day, night follows indifferently!  
In my heart, something is missing still,  
Like a love that I have yet to discover!*

“Untitled 1”

From *The Dream of a Butterfly*

On life's stormy roads, the Artist, who is now praised by people throughout the world as Supreme Master Ching Hai, continued on Her voyage: one day Germany, the next Italy, England, Nepal, India, and Tibet... Each footstep is directed toward the search, each moment a time for reflection. Searching and reflecting are the seeds of liberation and realization. One cannot sit in an ivory tower and comprehend an ever-changing world. People cannot understand their own fate without relating to the outside world and other beings.

Going forward, embarking on the journey, setting sail out in the ocean... From these processes, the Artist became a philosopher and a thinker. Through self-examination and self-confession, She rid Herself



of personal desires, transient obsessions, superficial wealth and fame, decaying bodies, and fleeting exchanges, to reach for majestic dimensions and glorious heavens:

*I'd lived through days of duplicity,  
Professing love not felt genuinely!  
Sweet utterances from rosy lips,  
Impassioned words from an ice cold heart...*

*I've visited many shores, calm or turbulent,  
Cleaning this face and adorning it anew,  
Desiring fame, fine houses and wealth,  
To enjoy this life, I've abandoned noble ideals...*

*After many struggles, I awoke suddenly  
Asking myself, "Is that all there is?"  
What does it matter, a few extra tens of years,  
To race for fame and gain with efforts so dear!*

"Self Confession"  
From *The Old Time*

After colliding with stark reality and fierce competition for fame and profit, if one is still attached to and mired in ignorance, then the physical self will just continue to indulge in transgressions and eventually decompose like the plants. More than anyone, Supreme Master Ching Hai asked Herself, and from this self-reflection the answer resounded:

*What shall I do in the days ahead,  
When hair loses luster and youthful rosinness fades?  
Is it death or a rebirth when the breath ceases?  
Christ and Buddha taught about Heaven and purgatory!*

"Self Confession"  
From *The Old Time*

As She continued onward, deep contemplation followed each of Her footsteps. Everywhere She went, She saw traces of sorrow in the human world:

*Back to the old city,  
Heard the waking of first love,  
But the bird in the cage could no longer fly;  
Mixing tears with ink on the page,  
Wrote love songs of golden days!*

*Gardens full of shadows of ghosts.  
Didn't fade away through wintry rain!  
One day I stopped between voyages,  
Wondered how much passion left in vain?!...*

“Old Town, Past Love!”

From *The Lost Memories*

The more She traveled along the path, the more Supreme Master Ching Hai realized that this world is only a transient place, and the human being a pitiable creature. With a generous and loving heart, She felt anguish not so much for Herself, but for the human plight:

*That afternoon, I too wanted to be a statue,  
Standing in the open space, watching the buzzing scenes.  
A strange sadness overcame my sorrowful heart:  
The compassion I felt, for me or for the multitude?*

“Winter Afternoon and a Stone Statue”

From *The Dream of a Butterfly*

From pain and misfortune, people learn and mature. The world is eventually seen as an illusion. After experiencing suffering and hardship, the spirit will ascend to the higher regions, becoming ubiquitous like the wind, like an ocean of love and reunion:

*And a stranger, on this foreign Earth,  
Walking twilight, hear winds call summer,  
Western sun now fragile, rain so soft,  
Like the sailing day on Pacific waters.*

*Tender hair, swinging pine forest,  
Deep eyes travel through tropical dreams...  
Why drowning in ocean of grief?  
Come, come home to the sweet silk arms.*

*We shall hail, and adorn the universe,  
We shall dance and sing, unite the world,  
We shall light golden fires on hilltops,  
Warming the sky of wintry future.*

“Love Melody 1”

From *The Lost Memories*

And like a loving mother who always wants her children to be safe and happy, like a dear sister who wants to uplift her unfortunate brothers and sisters from despair:

*I have arrived – do you not know?  
Reserved, with me, always the pink lotus.  
Awaiting you, generations have passed.  
Promised to return, do you not remember?*

*I want to lead you away over the clouds,  
Bright with halos, divine music, and lotus in bloom.  
Yet you remain lost in the land of illusionary dreams,  
Never to have left the old port, yet to be reborn!*

“Eternal Beloved”

From *The Dream of a Butterfly*

One day, there shall be a happy gathering, when the flowers of true love shall blossom. Although the rain and sun, rivers and mountains can keep people physically apart, they cannot contain the tender-hearted feelings humans have for each other, like sunflowers blooming under the sun:

*How many miles to summer?  
How many miles to spring?  
How many months for one Golden August?  
How many days for one Glorious Second?*

“Love Melody 4”

From *The Lost Memories*

Kind and open, the heart of a Saint fills the world. Personal sentiments and self-serving dreams vanish, making room for an immense ocean of love, for tolerance and forgiveness:

*I want to find the celestial granaries  
To scatter grains on mountains, forests, to feed all the birds,  
When I see, in the wintry gusts,  
Poor creatures on ragged wings looking for the leftover!!*

“Buddha’s Sadness”

From *The Dream of a Butterfly*

From lonely traces of previous lives on Earth, walking amid countless human illusions, still at the root, Supreme Master Ching Hai was already an extraordinary being. Born and submerged in a secular world, the noble seed still sprang up, sprouting continuously with every footstep as She traveled in the suffering realm. Each step carried an experience; every look expressed a reflection. From all that, the essence of the universe culminated within Her, enabling Her to reach the eternal soul and an everlasting world, one without either death or birth.

The destination to eternity cannot be arrived at overnight; one has to undergo many incarnations, through hardship and accrued karma:

*Once I came upon an empty mansion  
The broken door: spiderwebs curtained  
At the gate ajar, crickets chirped!  
Through vacant rooms the wind sighed a sad tune  
As if ancient spirits wandered about in mourning.*

“Abandoned Mansion”

From *Wu Tzu Poems*

Living in such a dismal world, regardless of how strong a person is, there will be times when he or she feels fragile and distressed:

*Buddha on the radiant dais high above,  
I'm so lost, stumbling through the dark road!  
I want to be devout, but it seems beyond my reach,  
Wanting to be virtuous, yet always deep in blunders and mistakes.*

*Many times I tell myself to repent  
But binding ties beckon me toward the reincarnate existence.*

The upheavals in this world never cease their detrimental impact on a pure heart. Desire for fame, glamour and extravagance, wealth and opulence: all have buried countless innocent souls. Supreme Master Ching Hai, too, had gone through all that tumult, yet She did not falter, for Her soul is too expansive: She knew how to rely on the spiritual path to attain self-liberation.

*Once again, I drift aimlessly in the ocean of life  
Bewildered, unsure of direction...  
At night still dreaming of glory and achievement,  
Only to awake and face the reality of broad daylight's frustration!*

*Nightmares are heavy curtains obscuring my wisdom,  
And calamities are swaying my faith.  
Vulnerable, I gauge every staggering step,  
Relying on the light of Buddha's teaching  
To guide through the passageway of ignorance.*

The struggle between evil and good, between attachment and freedom, between ignorance and enlightenment, between holding on and letting go, between staying and leaving, between the finite and the infinite, between Earth and Heaven, between impermanence and eternity, is always an intense and tragic struggle. Each choice inevitably carries its own pain and anguish.

*Many times I want to sever all attachments  
But my heart clings to old karmic bindings.  
Passion weaves its web, daily survival ties my limbs!  
The harder the struggle, the deeper the entanglement...*

“Like the Clouds High Above”

From *Wu Tzu Poems*

The worldly path that we traverse daily makes us sink more deeply into the labyrinth. The labyrinth itself has so many of its own amazing attractions – the illusions of life = that we sometimes deceive ourselves, thinking that they are true happiness. Led into the dark maze, we become lost and forget the way back to the celestial kingdom:

*When you came here, celestial dreams were forgotten—  
Cherishing some earthly love for self-amusement.*

*Watching you is heartbreaking:  
Once entering the labyrinth,  
Who knows what lifetime you'll exit!*

“The Labyrinth”  
From *Wu Tzu Poems*

There have always been conflicts between people and people, between people and life, between decadence and virtue, between submersion and liberation. Such struggles cause tragedies for human lives, and this is the karma we have to pay for the debts owed from previous incarnations:

*Returning home, there's no joy within me.  
Balancing worldly life and Zen, it's just sad and lonely.  
Before being born into this material plane,  
I've acquired unending debt from previous existence.*

“A Visit to Dharma Flower Temple”  
From *Wu Tzu Poems*

Due to the debts incurred from previous lifetimes, due to the choice of separation from the Source, and the struggles of transformation, people at times tend to be resigned: their consciousness and physical bodies have accumulated so much suffering and illusion! Albert Camus, in *Exile and the Kingdom*, bemoaned that the true home of humans must be in some other world and that this Earth is only a place of exile, where people become estranged from themselves and others. When people die is when they truly go back to their beloved homeland and are reborn into their own true world:

*I wait for death each second of the day  
Like an expectant mother waiting for the moment of delivery!  
Why am I still young, yet to grow wiser?  
Ever close to misery, so far from Nirvana...*

“Awaiting Death”  
From *Wu Tzu Poems*

To die is to be liberated, and to return to our true and cherished homeland; such is the lamentation of so many lifetimes, of so many thinkers, writers and poets. A poet named Huy Can once wrote:

*Sorrow has ripened, please pluck it down.  
Dust receive me whether Heaven or hell.*

In this ephemeral existence, exhausted from struggles in the course of life, human beings often feel despondent and wish to give up. This is common. But for someone like Supreme Master Ching Hai, who has been cultivating the seeds of liberating humanity, of loving sentient beings infinitely, and of dissolving hindering karma, the flower of eternity has already blossomed within Her:

*I love you as I love myself  
Like my love for all the continents, rivers and mountains.  
Tomorrow's good-bye, who will shed tears?  
This bow is to repay your love and deep affection!*

“I Love You”

From *Wu Tzu Poems*

Although She had to walk away from personal relationships, Supreme Master Ching Hai never wanted to abandon anyone. In Her heart, She vowed that one day when She attained enlightenment, She would return to this world to save others:

*Praised be the Buddha whose light guides my way,  
And protects you in your lonely days.*

*One day, I'll be enlightened and bring illumination to the world,  
We will be together for eternity...*

“For the One Who Stayed Behind”

From *The Dream of a Butterfly*



Her pledge to save humanity was fulfilled. Because of Her great benevolence and profound wisdom, and because the world was still in turmoil, Supreme Master Ching Hai wished not to enjoy the bliss of Nirvana alone. Instead, She returned to this world as a Bodhisattva, walking among the multitude:

*The Bodhisattva's life is filled with hardship  
Sentient beings are hard to save, their minds difficult to gauge!  
Incarnate into the ephemeral Earth  
Borrowing a temporary body to help the world.*

“The Bodhisattva’s Lotus”

From *Wu Tzu Poems*

With the merits derived through Her spiritual practice, She experienced miracles from the Almighty and was immersed in divine love:

*Practiced for thousands of years, just for this hour:  
To be near the omnipresent Beloved.*

*You're like a green palm tree in the desert  
Protecting my soul with eternal cool shade.  
All the treasures in the whole creation  
Equal not the dust under Your holy footprints.*

The more blessings She received from the Creator, the more She did not want to enjoy the bliss by Herself. Indeed, She has always been concerned about human ignorance:

*I weep silently, feeling sympathy for the worldlings  
On the gloomy path they continue to tread!  
You have come, yet no one knows  
Your divine being exiled to this sorrow.*

“A Great Holy Master”

From *Wu Tzu Poems*

With a noble heart, a dedication for service, and boundless love, Supreme Master Ching Hai has shared Her inner thoughts and feelings in Her elegant poetry. On the path She traveled, accompanying every saintly footstep were lotus blossoms and an abundance of brilliant verses. The more one reads Her poems, the more one feels a revival of hope, an infinite power, and a pure heart.

In a bleak world filled with misery and illusory memories, it seems as if the soul were sinking in despair. But in the confine of that muddy pond, the seed of divine yearning begins to sprout. The great writer Dostoevsky once said that only those who returned from death have the right to sing in this world.

Supreme Master Ching Hai has reminded us that liberation and enlightenment are to be experienced through patience and endurance, the path through which She already passed. From the lonely and bewildered moments of Her previous lives, Supreme Master Ching Hai experienced firsthand the discovery of liberation and awakening. The roads She traveled were paved with endless suffering, but from there, She cleansed off the dust of life to purify the body, elevate the mind, and find a way to save sentient beings. Her poems reflect this holy path.

Reading Her poetry and observing Her every footstep, we light up our own path and purify ourselves, so that we can follow Her noble journey to arrive at an eternally peaceful realm.



*Love*

