

The Urban Well

The Mercy Seminar 2024, Term I.2

FIFTEEN

Feng: The ancient masters were subtle, mysterious, profound, responsive.
The depth of their knowledge is unfathomable.
Because it is unfathomable,
All we can do is describe their appearance.
Watchful, like men crossing a winter stream.
Alert, like men aware of danger.
Courteous, like visiting guests.
Yielding, like ice about to melt.
Simple, like uncarved blocks of wood.
Hollow, like caves.
Opaque, like muddy pools.

Who can wait quietly while the mud settles?
Who can remain still until the moment of action?
Observers of the Tao do not seek fulfillment.
Not seeking fulfillment, they are not swayed by desire for change.

Chan: Of old those who were the best rulers were
subtly mysterious and profoundly penetrating;
Too deep to comprehend.
And because they cannot be comprehended,
I can only describe them arbitrarily:
Cautious, like crossing a frozen stream in the winter,
Being at a loss, like one fearing danger on all sides,
Reserved, like one visiting,
Supple and pliant, like ice about to melt,
Genuine, like a piece of uncarved wood,
Open and broad, like a valley,
Merged and undifferentiated, like muddy water.

Who can make muddy water gradually clear through tranquility?
Who can make the still gradually come to life through activity?
He who embraces this Tao does not want to fill himself to overflowing.
It is precisely because there is no overflowing that he
is beyond wearing out and renewal.

SIXTEEN

Feng: Empty yourself of everything.
 Let the mind rest at peace.
 The ten thousand things rise and fall while the Self watches their return.
 They grow and flourish and then return to the source.
 Returning to the source is stillness, which is the way of nature.
 The way of nature is unchanging.
 Knowing constancy is insight.
 Not knowing constancy leads to disaster.
 Knowing constancy, the mind is open.
 With an open mind, you will be openhearted.
 Being openhearted, you will act royally.
 Being royal, you will attain the divine.
 Being divine, you will be at one with the Tao.
 Being at one with the Tao is eternal.
 And though the body dies, the Tao will never pass away.

Chan: Attain complete vacuity,
 Maintain steadfast quietude.
 All things come into being,
 And I see thereby their return.
 All things flourish,
 But each one returns to its root.
 This return to its root means tranquility.
 It is called returning to its destiny.
 To return to destiny is called the eternal (Tao).
 To know the eternal is called enlightenment.
 Not to know the eternal is to act blindly to result in disaster.
 He who knows the eternal is all-embracing.
 Being all-embracing, he is impartial.
 Being impartial, he is kingly (universal).
 Being kingly, he is one with Nature.
 Being one with Nature, he is in accord with Tao.
 Being in accord with Tao, he is everlasting,
 And is free from danger throughout his lifetime.

SEVENTEEN

Feng: The very highest is barely known by men.
 Then comes that which they know and love,
 Then that which is feared,
 Then that which is despised.

He who does not trust enough will not be trusted.

When actions are performed

Without unnecessary speech,
People say, “We did it!”

Chan: The best (rulers) are those whose existence is (merely)
known by the people.
The next best are those who are loved and praised.
The next are those who are feared.
And the next are those who are despised.
It is only when one does not have enough faith in others
that others will have no faith in him.
[The great rulers] value their words highly.
They accomplish their task; they complete their work.
Nevertheless their people say that they simply follow Nature
(*Tzu-jan*).

EIGHTEEN

Feng: When the great Tao is forgotten,
Kindness and morality arise.
When wisdom and intelligence are born,
The great pretense begins.

When there is no peace within the family,
Filial piety and devotion arise.
When the country is confused and in chaos,
Loyal ministers appear.

Chan: When the great Tao declined,
The doctrines of humanity (*jen*) and righteousness (*i*) arose.
When knowledge and wisdom appeared,
There emerged great hypocrisy.
When the six family relationships are not in harmony,
There will be the advocacy of filial piety and deep love to children.
When a country is in disorder,
There will be praise of loyal ministers.

NINETEEN

Feng: Give up sainthood, renounce wisdom,
And it will be a hundred times better for everyone.

Give up kindness, renounce morality,
And men will rediscover filial piety and love.

Give up ingenuity, renounce profit,
And bandits and thieves will disappear.

These three are outward forms alone; they are not sufficient in themselves.
 It is more important
 To see the simplicity,
 To realize one's true nature,
 To cast off selfishness
 And temper desire.

Chan: Abandon sageliness and discard wisdom;
 Then the people will benefit a hundredfold.
 Abandon humanity and discard righteousness;
 Then the people will return to filial piety and deep love.
 Abandon skill and discard profit;
 Then there will be no thieves or robbers.
 However, these three things are ornament (*wen*) and not adequate.
 Therefore let people hold on to these:
 Manifest plainness,
 Embrace simplicity,
 Reduce selfishness,
 Have few desires.

TWENTY

Feng: Give up learning, and put an end to your troubles.

Is there a difference between yes and no?
 Is there a difference between good and evil?
 Must I fear what others fear? What nonsense!
 Other people are contented, enjoying the sacrificial feast of the ox.
 In spring some go to the park, and climb the terrace,
 But I alone am drifting, not knowing where I am.
 Like a newborn babe before it learns to smile,
 I am alone, without a place to go.

Others have more than they need, but I alone have nothing.
 I am a fool. Oh, yes! I am confused.
 Other men are clear and bright,
 But I alone am dim and weak.
 Other men are sharp and clever,
 But I alone am dull and stupid.
 Oh, I drift like the waves of the sea,
 Without direction, like the restless wind.

Everyone else is busy,
 But I alone am aimless and depressed.
 I am different.

I am nourished by the great mother.

Chan: Abandon learning and there will be no sorrow.
 How much difference is there between "Yes, sir," and "Of course not"?
 How much difference is there between "good" and "evil"?
 What people dread, do not fail to dread.
 But, alas, how confused, and the end is not yet.
 The multitude are merry, as though feasting on a day of sacrifice,
 Or like ascending a tower at springtime.
 I alone am inert, showing no sign (of desires),
 Like an infant that has not yet smiled.
 Wearied, indeed, I seem to be without a home.
 The multitude all possess more than enough,
 I alone seem to have lost all.
 Mine is indeed the mind of an ignorant man,
 Indiscriminate and dull!
 Common folks are indeed brilliant;
 I alone seem to be in the dark.
 Common folks see differences and are clear-cut;
 I alone make no distinctions.
 I seem drifting as the sea;
 Like the wind blowing about, seemingly without destination.
 The multitude all have a purpose;
 I alone seem to be stubborn and rustic.
 I alone differ from others,
 And value drawing sustenance from Mother (Tao).

TWENTY-ONE

Feng: The greatest Virtue (*te*) is to follow Tao and Tao alone.
 The Tao is elusive and intangible.
 Oh, it is intangible and elusive, and yet within is image.
 Oh, it is elusive and intangible, and yet within is form.
 Oh, it is dim and dark, and yet within is essence.
 This essence is very real, therein lies faith.
 From the very beginning until now its name has never been forgotten.
 Thus I perceive the creation.
 How do I know the ways of creation?
 Because of this.

Chan: The all-embracing quality of the great virtue (*te*) follows
 alone from the Tao.
 The thing that is called Tao is eluding and vague.
 Vague and eluding, there is in it the form.
 Eluding and vague, in it are things.
 Deep and obscure, in it is the essence.

The essence is very real; in it are evidences.
 From the time of old until now, its name (manifestations) ever remains,
 By which we may see the beginning of all things.
 How do I know that the beginnings of all things are so?
 Through this (Tao).

TWENTY-TWO

Feng: Yield and overcome;
 Bend and be straight;
 Empty and be full;
 Wear out and be new;
 Have little and gain;
 Have much and be confused.

Therefore wise men embrace the one
 And set an example to all.
 Not putting on a display,
 They shine forth.
 Not justifying themselves,
 They are distinguished.
 Not boasting,
 They receive recognition.
 Not bragging,
 They never falter.
 They do not quarrel,
 So no one quarrels with them.
 Therefore the ancients say, "Yield and overcome."
 Is that an empty saying?
 Be really whole
 And all things will come to you.

Chan: To yield is to be preserved whole.
 To be bent is to become straight.
 To be empty is to be full.
 To be worn out is to be renewed.
 To have little is to possess.
 To have plenty is to be perplexed.
 Therefore the sage embraces the One
 And becomes the model of the world.
 He does not show himself; therefore he is luminous.
 He does not justify himself; therefore he becomes prominent.
 He does not boast of himself; therefore he is given credit.
 He does not brag; therefore he can endure for long.
 It is precisely because he does not compete that the world
 cannot compete with him.

Is the ancient saying, "To yield is to be preserved whole," empty words?
Truly he will be preserved and (prominence, etc.) will come to him.

TWENTY-THREE

Feng: To talk little is natural.
High winds do not last all morning.
Heavy rain does not last all day.
Why is this? Heaven and earth!
If heaven and earth cannot make things eternal,
How is it possible for man?

He who follows the Tao
Is at one with the Tao.
He who is virtuous
Experiences Virtue.
He who loses the way
Feels lost.
When you are at one with the Tao,
The Tao welcomes you.
When you are at one with Virtue,
The Virtue is always there.
When you are at one with loss,
The loss is experienced willingly.

He who does not trust enough
Will not be trusted.

Chan: Nature says few words.
For the same reason a whirlwind does not last a whole morning,
Nor does a rainstorm last a whole day.
What causes them?
It is Heaven and Earth (Nature).
If even Heaven and Earth cannot make them last long,
How much less can man?
Therefore he who follows Tao is identified with Tao.
He who follows virtue is identified with virtue.
He who abandons (Tao) is identified with the abandonment (of Tao).
He who is identified with Tao—Tao is also happy to have him.
He who is identified with virtue—virtue is also happy to have him.
And he who is identified with the abandonment (of Tao)—
the abandonment (of Tao) is also happy to abandon him.
It is only when one does not have enough faith in others
that others will have no faith in him.

TWENTY-FOUR

Feng: He who stands on tiptoe is not steady.
 He who strides cannot maintain the pace.
 He who makes a show is not enlightened.
 He who is self-righteous is not respected.
 He who boasts achieves nothing.
 He who brags will not endure.
 According to followers of the Tao,
 “These are extra food and unnecessary baggage.”
 They do not bring happiness.
 Therefore followers of the Tao avoid them.

Chan: He who stands on tiptoe is not steady.
 He who strides forward does not go.
 He who shows himself is not luminous.
 He who justifies himself is not prominent.
 He who boasts of himself is not given credit.
 He who brags does not endure for long.
 From the point of view of Tao, these are like remnants of
 food and tumors of action,
 Which all creatures detest.
 Therefore those who possess Tao turn away from them.

TWENTY-FIVE

Feng: Something mysteriously formed,
 Born before heaven and earth.
 In the silence and the void,
 Standing alone and unchanging,
 Ever present and in motion.
 Perhaps it is the mother of ten thousand things.
 I do not know its name.
 Call it Tao.
 For lack of a better word, I call it great.

Being great, it flows.
 It flows far away.
 Having gone far, it returns.
 Therefore, “Tao is great,
 Heaven is great;
 Earth is great;
 The king is also great.”
 These are the four great powers
 of the universe,
 And the king is one of them.

Man follows the earth.
 Earth follows heaven.
 Heaven follows the Tao.
 Tao follows what is natural.

Chan: There was something undifferentiated and yet complete,
 Which existed before heaven and earth.
 Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not change.
 It operates everywhere and is free from danger.
 It may be considered the mother of the universe.
 I do not know its name; I call it Tao.
 If forced to give it a name, I shall call it Great.
 Now being great means functioning everywhere.
 Functioning everywhere means far-reaching.
 Being far-reaching means returning to the original point.
 Therefore Tao is great.
 Heaven is great.
 Earth is great.
 And the king is also great.
 There are four great things in the universe, and the king is one of them.
 Man models himself after Earth.
 Earth models itself after Heaven.
 Heaven models itself after Tao.
 And Tao models itself after Nature.

TWENTY-SIX

Feng: The heavy is the root of the light;
 The still is the master of unrest.

Therefore the sage, traveling all day,
 Does not lose sight of his baggage.
 Though there are beautiful things to be seen,
 He remains unattached and calm.

Why should the lord of ten thousand chariots act lightly in public?
 To be light is to lose one's root.
 To be restless is to lose one's control.

Chan: The heavy is the root of the light.
 The tranquil is the ruler of the hasty.
 Therefore the sage travels all day
 Without leaving his baggage.
 Even at the sight of magnificent scenes,
 He remains leisurely and indifferent.
 How is it that a lord with ten thousand chariots

Should behave lightheartedly in his empire?
If he is lighthearted, the minister will be destroyed.
If he is hasty, the ruler is lost.

TWENTY-SEVEN

Feng: A good walker leaves no tracks;
A good speaker makes no slips;
A good reckoner needs no tally.
A good door needs no lock,
Yet no one can open it.
Good binding requires no knots,
Yet no one can loosen it.

Therefore the sage takes care of all men
And abandons no one.
He takes care of all things
And abandons nothing.
This is called “following the light.”

What is a good man?
A teacher of a bad man.
What is a bad man?
A good man’s charge.
If the teacher is not respected,
And the student not cared for,
Confusion will arise, however clever one is.
This is the crux of mystery.

Chan: A good traveler leaves no track or trace.
A good speech leaves no flaws.
A good reckoner uses no counters.
A well-shut door needs no bolts, and yet it cannot be opened.
A well-tied knot needs no rope and yet none can untie it.
Therefore the sage is always good in saving men and
consequently no man is rejected.
He is always good in saving things and consequently nothing
is rejected.
This is called following the light (of Nature).
Therefore the good man is the teacher of the bad,
And the bad is the material from which the good may learn.
He who does not value the teacher,
Or greatly care for the material,
Is greatly deluded although he may be learned,
Such is the essential mystery.