

The Urban Well

The Mercy Seminar 2024, Term I.3

TWENTY-EIGHT

Feng: Know the strength of man,
But keep a woman's care!
Be the stream of the universe!
Being the stream of the universe,
Ever true and unswerving,
Become as a little child once more.

Know the white,
But keep the black!
Be an example to the world!
Being an example to the world,
Ever true and unwavering,
Return to the infinite.

Know honor,
Yet keep humility.
Be the valley of the universe!
Being the valley of the universe,
Ever true and resourceful,
Return to the state of the uncarved block.

When the block is carved, it becomes useful.
When the sage uses it, he becomes the ruler.
Thus, "A great tailor cuts little."

Chan: He who knows the male (active force) and keeps to the
female (the passive force or receptive element)
Becomes the ravine of the world.
Being the ravine of the world,
He will never depart from eternal virtue,
But returns to the state of infancy.
He who knows the white (glory) and yet keeps to the
black (humility),
Becomes the model for the world.
Being the model for the world,
He will never deviate from eternal virtue,

But returns to the state of the Ultimate of Non-being.
 He who knows glory but keeps to humility,
 Becomes the valley of the world.
 Being the valley of the world,
 He will be proficient in eternal virtue,
 And returns to the state of simplicity (uncarved wood).
 When the uncarved wood is broken up, it is turned into
 concrete things (as Tao is transformed into the myriad things).
 But when the sage uses it, he becomes the leading official.
 Therefore the great ruler does not cut up.

TWENTY-NINE

Feng: Do you think you can take over the universe and improve it?
 I do not believe it can be done.

The universe is sacred.
 You cannot improve it.
 If you try to change it, you will ruin it.
 If you try to hold it, you will lose it.

So sometimes things are ahead and sometimes they are behind;
 Sometimes breathing is hard, sometimes it comes easily;
 Sometimes there is strength and sometimes weakness;
 Sometimes one is up and sometimes down.

Therefore the sage avoids extremes, excesses, and complacency.

Chan: When one desires to take over the empire and act on it
 (interfere with it),
 I see that he will not succeed.
 The empire is a spiritual thing, and should not be acted on.
 He who acts on it harms it.
 He who holds on to it loses it.
 Among creatures some lead and some follow.
 Some blow hot and some blow cold.
 Some are strong and some are weak.
 Some may break and some may fall.
 Therefore the sage discards the extremes, the extravagant,
 and the excessive.

THIRTY

Feng: Whenever you advise a ruler in the way of Tao,
 Counsel him not to use force to conquer the universe.
 For this would only cause resistance.

Thorn bushes spring up wherever the army has passed.
 Lean years follow in the wake of a great war.
 Just do what needs to be done.
 Never take advantage of power.

Achieve results,
 But never glory in them.
 Achieve results,
 But never boast.
 Achieve results,
 But never be proud.
 Achieve results,
 Because this is the natural way.
 Achieve results,
 But not through violence.

Force is followed by loss of strength.
 This is not the way of Tao.
 That which goes against the Tao
 comes to an early end.

Chan: He who assists the ruler with Tao does not dominate
 the world with force.
 The use of force usually brings requital.
 Wherever armies are stationed, briars and thorns grow.
 Great wars are always followed by famines.
 A good (general) achieves his purpose and stops,
 But dares not seek to dominate the world.
 He achieves his purpose but does not brag about it.
 He achieves his purpose but does not boast about it.
 He achieves his purpose but is not proud of it.
 He achieves his purpose but only as an unavoidable step.
 He achieves his purpose but does not aim to dominate.
 (For) after things reach their prime, they begin to grow old,
 Which means being contrary to Tao.
 Whatever is contrary to Tao will soon perish.

THIRTY-ONE

Feng: Good weapons are instruments of fear; all creatures hate them.
 Therefore followers of Tao never use them.
 The wise man prefers the left.
 The man of war prefers the right.

Weapons are instruments of war; they are not a wise man's tools.
 He uses them only when he has no choice.

Peace and quiet are dear to his heart,
 And victory no cause for rejoicing.
 If you rejoice in victory, then you delight in killing;
 If you delight in killing, you cannot fulfill yourself.

On happy occasions precedence is given to the left,
 On sad occasions to the right.
 In the army the general stands on the left,
 The commander-in-chief on the right.
 This means that war is conducted like a funeral.
 When many people are being killed,
 They should be mourned in heartfelt sorrow.
 That is why a victory must be observed like a funeral.

Chan: Fine weapons are instruments of evil.
 They are hated by men.
 Therefore those who possess Tao turn away from them.
 The good ruler when at home honors the left
 (symbolic of good omens).
 When at war he honors the right (symbolic of evil omens).
 Weapons are instruments of evil, not the instruments of
 a good ruler.
 When he uses them unavoidably, he regards calm restraint
 as the best principle.
 Even when he is victorious, he does not regard it as praiseworthy,
 For to praise victory is to delight in the slaughter of men.
 He who delights in the slaughter of men will not succeed in the empire.
 In auspicious affairs, the left is honored.
 In inauspicious affairs, the right is honored.
 The lieutenant-general stands on the left.
 The senior general stands on the right.
 That is to say that the arrangement follows that of funeral ceremonies.
 For the slaughter of the multitude, let us weep with sorrow and grief.
 For a victory, let us observe the occasion with funeral ceremonies.

THIRTY-TWO

Feng: The Tao is forever undefined.
 Small though it is in the unformed state, it cannot be grasped.
 If kings and lords could harness it,
 The ten thousand things would naturally obey.
 Heaven and earth would come together
 And gentle rain fall.
 Men would need no more instruction
 and all things would take their course.

Once the whole is divided, the parts need names.
 There are already enough names.
 One must know when to stop.
 Knowing when to stop averts trouble.
 Tao in the world is like a river flowing home to the sea.

Chan: Tao is eternal and has no name.
 Though its simplicity seems insignificant,
 none in the world can master it.
 If kings and barons would hold on to it, all things would
 submit to them spontaneously.
 Heaven and earth unite to drip sweet dew.
 Without the command of men, it drips evenly over all.
 As soon as there were regulations and institutions,
 there were names (differentiation of things).
 As soon as there are names, know that it is time to stop.
 It is by knowing when to stop that one can be free from danger.
 Analogically, Tao in the world (where everything is embraced by it),
 may be compared to rivers and streams running into the sea.

THIRTY-THREE

Feng: Knowing others is wisdom;
 Knowing the self is enlightenment.
 Mastering others requires force;
 Mastering the self needs strength.

He who knows he has enough is rich.
 Perseverance is a sign of will power.
 He who stays where he is endures.
 To die but not to perish is to be eternally present.

Chan: He who knows others is wise;
 He who knows himself is enlightened.
 He who conquers others has physical strength.
 He who conquers himself is strong.
 He who is contented is rich.
 He who acts with vigor has will.
 He who does not lose his place (with Tao) will endure.
 He who dies but does not really perish enjoys long life.

THIRTY-FOUR

Feng: The great Tao flows everywhere, both to the left and to the right.
 The ten thousand things depend upon it; it holds nothing back.
 It fulfills its purpose silently and makes no claim.

It nourishes the ten thousand things,
And yet is not their lord.
It has no aim; it is very small.

The ten thousand things return to it,
Yet it is not their lord.
It is very great.

It does not show greatness,
And is therefore truly great.

Chan: The Great Tao flows everywhere.
It may go left or right.
All things depend on it for life, and it does not turn away
from them.
It accomplishes its task, but does not claim credit for it.
It clothes and feeds all things but does not claim to be
master over them.
Always without desires, it may be called The Small.
All things come to it and it does not master them;
it may be called The Great.
Therefore (the sage) never strives himself for the great,
and thereby the great is achieved.

THIRTY-FIVE

Feng: All men will come to him who keeps to the one,
For there lie rest and happiness and peace.

Passersby may stop for music and good food,
But a description of the Tao
Seems without substance or flavor.
It cannot be seen, it cannot be heard,
And yet it cannot be exhausted.

Chan: Hold fast to the great form (Tao),
And all the world will come.
They come and will encounter no harm;
But enjoy comfort, peace, and health.
When there are music and dainties,
Passing strangers will stay.
But the words uttered by Tao,
How insipid and tasteless!
We look at Tao; it is imperceptible.
We listen to it; it is inaudible.

We use it; it is inexhaustible.

THIRTY-SIX

Feng: That which shrinks
Must first expand.
That which fails
Must first be strong.
That which is cast down
Must first be raised.
Before receiving
There must be giving.

This is called perception of the nature of things.
Soft and weak overcome hard and strong.

Fish cannot leave deep waters,
And a country's weapons should not be displayed.

Chan: In order to contract,
It is necessary first to expand.
In order to weaken,
It is necessary first to strengthen.
In order to destroy,
It is necessary first to promote.
In order to grasp,
It is necessary first to give.
This is called subtle light.
The weak and the tender overcome the hard and the strong.
Fish should not be taken away from water.
And sharp weapons of the state should not be displayed
to the people.

THIRTY-SEVEN

Feng: Tao abides in non-actions,
Yet nothing is left undone.
If kings and lords observed this,
The ten thousand things would develop naturally.
If they still desired to act,
They would return to the simplicity of formless substance.
Without form there is no desire.
Without desire there is tranquility.
And this way all things would be at peace.

Chan: Tao invariably takes no action, and yet there is nothing left undone.

If kings and barons can keep it, all things will transform spontaneously.
 If, after transformation, they should desire to be active,
 I would restrain them with simplicity, which has no name.
 Simplicity, which has no name, is free of desires.
 Being free of desires, it is tranquil.
 And the world will be at peace of its own accord.

THIRTY-EIGHT

Feng: A truly good man is not aware of his goodness,
 And is therefore good.
 A foolish man tries to be good,
 And is therefore not good.

A truly good man does nothing,
 Yet leaves nothing undone.
 A foolish man is always doing,
 Yet much remains to be done.

When a truly kind man does something, he leaves nothing undone.
 When a just man does something, he leaves a great deal to be done.
 When a disciplinarian does something and no one responds,
 He rolls up his sleeves in an attempt to enforce order.

Therefore when Tao is lost, there is goodness.
 When goodness is lost, there is kindness.
 When kindness is lost, there is justice.
 When justice is lost, there is ritual.
 Now ritual is the husk of faith and loyalty, the beginning of confusion.
 Knowledge of the future is only a flowery trapping of Tao.
 It is the beginning of folly.

Therefore the truly great man dwells on what is real
 and not what is on the surface,
 On the fruit and not the flower.
 Therefore accept the one and reject the other.

Chan: The man of superior virtue is not (conscious of) his virtue,
 And in this way he really possesses virtue.
 The man of inferior virtue never loses (sight of) his virtue,
 And in this way he loses his virtue.
 The man of superior virtue takes no action,
 but has no ulterior motive to do so.
 The man of inferior virtue takes action,
 and has an ulterior motive to do so.
 The man of superior humanity takes action,

but has no ulterior motive to do so.
 The man of superior righteousness takes action,
 and has an ulterior motive to do so.
 The man of superior propriety takes action,
 And when people do not respond to it, he will stretch his arms
 and force it on them.
 Therefore, only when Tao is lost does the doctrine of virtue arise.
 When virtue is lost, only then does the doctrine of humanity arise.
 When humanity is lost, only then does the doctrine of righteousness arise.
 When righteousness is lost, only then does the doctrine of propriety arise.
 Now, propriety is a superficial expression of loyalty and faithfulness,
 and the beginning of disorder.
 Those who are the first to know have the flowers (appearance) of Tao
 but are the beginning of ignorance.
 For this reason the great man dwells in the thick (substantial),
 and does not rest with the thin (superficial).
 He dwells in the fruit (reality), and does not rest with the flower (appearance).
 Therefore he rejects the one, and accepts the other.

THIRTY-NINE

Feng: These things from ancient times arise from one:
 The sky is whole and clear.
 The earth is whole and firm.
 The spirit is whole and strong.
 The valley is whole and full.
 The ten thousand things are whole and alive.
 Kings and lords are whole, and the country is upright.
 All these are in virtue of wholeness.

The clarity of the sky prevents its falling.
 The firmness of the earth prevents its splitting.
 The strength of the spirit prevents its being used up.
 The fullness of the valley prevents its running dry.
 The growth of the ten thousand things prevents their dying out.
 The leadership of kings and lords prevents the downfall
 of the country.

Therefore the humble is the root of the noble.
 The low is the foundation of the high.
 Princes and lords consider themselves
 “orphaned,” “widowed,” and “worthless.”
 Do they not depend on being humble?

Too much success is not an advantage.
 Do not tinkle like jade

Or clatter like stone chimes.

Chan: Of old those that obtained the One:
 Heaven obtained the One and became clear.
 Earth obtained the One and became tranquil.
 The spiritual beings obtained the One and became divine.
 The valley obtained the One and became full.
 The myriad things obtained the One and lived and grew.
 Kings and barons obtained the One and became rulers of the empire.
 What made them so is the One.
 If heaven had not thus become clear,
 It would soon crack.
 If the earth had not thus become tranquil,
 It would soon be shaken.
 If the spiritual beings had not thus become divine,
 They would soon wither away.
 If the valley had not thus become full,
 It would soon become exhausted.
 If the myriad things had not thus lived and grown,
 They would soon become extinct.
 If kings and barons had not thus become honorable and high in position,
 They would soon fall.
 Therefore humble station is the basis of honor.
 The low is the foundation of the high.
 For this reason kings and barons call themselves the orphaned,
 the lonely ones, the unworthy.
 Is this not regarding humble station as the basis of honor?
 Is it not?
 Therefore enumerate all the parts of a chariot as you may,
 and you still have no chariot.
 Rather than jingle like the jade,
 Rumble like the rocks.

FORTY

Feng: Returning is the motion of the Tao.
 Yielding is the way of the Tao.
 The ten thousand things are born of being.
 Being is born of not being.

Chan: Reversion is the action of Tao.
 Weakness is the function of Tao.
 All things in the world come from being.
 And being comes from non-being.