

The Urban Well

The Mercy Seminar 2024, Term I.4

FORTY-ONE

Feng: The wise student hears of the Tao and practices it diligently.
The average student hears of the Tao and gives it thought now and again.
The foolish student hears of the Tao and laughs aloud.
If there were no laughter, the Tao would not be what it is.

Hence it is said:
The bright path seems dim;
Going forward seems like retreat;
The easy way seems hard;
The highest Virtue seems empty;
Great purity seems sullied;
A wealth of Virtue seems inadequate;
The strength of Virtue seems frail;
Real Virtue seems unreal;
The perfect square has no corners;
Great talents ripen late;
The highest notes are hard to hear;
The greatest form has no shape.
The Tao is hidden and without name.
The Tao alone nourishes and brings everything to fulfillment.

Chan: When the highest type of men hear Tao,
They diligently practice it.
When the average type of men hear Tao,
They half believe in it.
When the lowest type of men hear Tao,
They laugh heartily at it.
If they did not laugh at it, it would not be Tao.
Therefore there is the established saying:
The Tao which is bright appears to be dark.
The Tao which goes forward appears to fall backward.
The Tao which is level appears uneven.
Great virtue appears like a valley (hollow).
Great purity appears like disgrace.
Far-reaching virtue appears as if insufficient.
Solid virtue appears as if unsteady.
True substance appears to be changeable.

The great square has no corners.
 The great implement (or talent) is slow to finish (or mature).
 Great music sounds faint.
 Great form has no shape.
 Tao is hidden and nameless.
 Yet it is Tao alone that skillfully provides for all and
 brings them to perfection.

FORTY-TWO

Feng: The Tao begot one.
 One begot two.
 Two begot three.
 And three begot the ten thousand things.

The ten thousand things carry yin and embrace yang.
 They achieve harmony by combining these forces.

Men hate to be “orphaned,” “widowed,” and “worthless,”
 But this is how kings and lords describe themselves.

For one gains by losing
 And loses by gaining.

What others teach, I also teach; that is:
 “A violent man will die a violent death!”
 This will be the essence of my teaching.

Chan: Tao produced the One.
 The One produced the two.
 The two produced the three.
 And the three produced the ten thousand things.
 The ten thousand things carry the yin and embrace the yang,
 and through the blending of the material force (*ch'i*) they achieve harmony.
 People hate to be the orphaned, the lonely ones, and the unworthy.
 And yet kings and lords call themselves by these names.
 Therefore it is often the case that things gain by losing
 and lose by gaining.
 What others have taught, I teach also:
 “Violent and fierce people do not die a natural death.”
 I shall make this the father (basis or starting point)
 of my teaching.

FORTY-THREE

Feng: The softest thing in the universe
Overcomes the hardest thing in the universe.
That without substance can enter where there is no room.
Hence I know the value of non-action.

Teaching without words and work without doing
Are understood by very few.

Chan: The softest things in the world overcome
the hardest things in the world.
Non-being penetrates that in which there is no space.
Through this I know the advantage of taking no action.
Few in the world can understand teaching without words
and the advantage of taking no action.

FORTY-FOUR

Feng: Fame or self: Which matters more?
Self or wealth: Which is more precious?
Gain or lose: Which is more painful?

He who is attached to things will suffer much.
He who saves will suffer heavy loss.
A contented man is never disappointed.
He who knows when to stop does not find himself in trouble.
He will stay forever safe.

Chan: Which does one love more, fame or one's own life?
Which is more valuable, one's own life or wealth?
Which is worse, gain or loss?
Therefore he who has lavish desires will spend extravagantly.
He who hoards most will lose heavily.
He who is contented suffers no disgrace.
He who knows when to stop is free from danger.
Therefore he can long endure.

FORTY-FIVE

Feng: Great accomplishment seems imperfect,
Yet it does not outlive its usefulness.
Great fullness seems empty,
Yet it cannot be exhausted.

Great straightness seems twisted.
Great intelligence seems stupid.

Great eloquence seems awkward.

Movement overcomes cold.

Stillness overcomes heat.

Stillness and tranquility set things in order in the universe.

Chan: What is most perfect seems to be incomplete;

But its utility is unimpaired.

What is most full seems to be empty;

But its usefulness is inexhaustible.

What is most straight seems to be crooked.

The greatest skills seems to be clumsy.

The greatest eloquence seems to stutter.

Hasty movement overcomes cold,

(But) tranquility overcomes heat.

By being greatly tranquil,

One is qualified to be the ruler of the world.

FORTY-SIX

Feng: When the Tao is present in the universe,

The horses haul manure.

When the Tao is absent from the universe,

War horses are bred outside the city.

There is no greater sin than desire,

No greater curse than discontent,

No greater misfortune than wanting something for oneself.

Therefore he who knows that enough is enough will always have enough.

Chan: When Tao prevails in the world, galloping horses are turned back
to fertilize (the fields with their dung).

When Tao does not prevail in the world,

war horses thrive in the suburbs.

There is no calamity greater than lavish desires.

There is no greater guilt than discontentment.

And there is no greater disaster than greed.

He who is contented with contentment is always contented.

FORTY-SEVEN

Feng: Without going outside, you may know the whole world.

Without looking through your window, you may see the ways [Tao] of heaven.

The farther you go, the less you know.

Thus the sage knows without traveling;

He sees without looking;
He works without doing.

Chan: One may know the world without going out of doors.
One may see the Way of Heaven without looking through the windows.
The further one goes, the less one knows.
Therefore the sage knows without going about,
Understands without seeing,
And accomplishes without any action.

FORTY-EIGHT

Feng: In the pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired.
In the pursuit of Tao, every day something is dropped.

Less and less is done
Until non-action is achieved.
When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.

The world is ruled by letting things take their course.
It cannot be ruled by interfering.

Chan: The pursuit of learning is to increase day after day.
The pursuit of Tao is to decrease day after day.
It is to decrease and further decrease until one reaches the point
of taking no action.
No action is undertaken, and yet nothing is left undone.
An empire is often brought to order by having no activity (*laissez-faire*).
If one (likes to) undertake activity,
he is not qualified to govern the empire.

FORTY-NINE

Feng: The sage has no mind of his own.
He is aware of the needs of others.

I am good to people who are good.
I am also good to people who are not good.
Because Virtue is goodness.
I have faith in people who are faithful.
I also have faith in people who are not faithful.
Because Virtue is faithfulness.

The sage is shy and humble - to the world he seems confusing.
Men look to him and listen.
He behaves like a little child.

Chan: The sage has no fixed (personal) ideas.
 He regards the people's ideas as his own.
 I treat those who are good with goodness,
 And I also treat those who are not good with goodness.
 Thus goodness is attained.
 I am honest to those who are honest,
 And I am also honest to those who are not honest.
 Thus honesty is attained.
 The sage, in the government of his empire, has no subjective viewpoint.
 His mind forms a harmonious whole with that of his people.
 They all lend their eyes and ears, and he treats them all as infants.

FIFTY

Feng: Between birth and death,
 Three in ten are followers of life,
 Three in ten are followers of death,
 And men just passing from birth to death also number three in ten.
 Why is this so?
 Because they live their lives on the gross level.

He who knows how to live can walk abroad
 Without fear of rhinoceros or tiger.
 He will not be wounded in battle.
 For in him rhinoceroses can find no place to thrust their horn,
 Tigers no place to use their claws,
 And weapons no place to pierce.
 Why is this so?
 Because he has no place for death to enter.

Chan: Man comes into life and goes out to death.
 Three out of ten are companions of life.
 Three out of ten are companions of death.
 And three out of ten in their lives lead from activity to death.
 And for what reason?
 Because of man's intensive striving after life.
 I have heard that one who is a good preserver of his life
 will not meet tigers or wild buffalos,
 And in fighting will not try to escape from weapons of war.
 The wild buffalo cannot butt its horns against him,
 The tiger cannot fasten its claws in him,
 And weapons of war cannot thrust their blades into him.
 And for what reason?
 Because in him there is no room for death.

FIFTY-ONE

Feng: All things arise from Tao.
 They are nourished by Virtue.
 They are formed from matter.
 They are shaped by environment.
 Thus the ten thousand things all respect Tao and honor Virtue.
 Respect of Tao and honor of Virtue are not demanded,
 But they are in the nature of things.

Therefore all things arise from Tao.
 By Virtue they are nourished,
 Developed, cared for,
 Sheltered, comforted,
 Grown, and protected.
 Creating without claiming,
 Doing without taking credit,
 Guiding without interfering,
 This is Primal Virtue.

Chan: Tao produces them (the ten thousand things).
 Virtue fosters them.
 Matter gives them physical form.
 The circumstances and tendencies complete them.
 Therefore the ten thousand things esteem Tao and honor virtue.
 Tao is esteemed and virtue is honored without anyone's order.
 They always come spontaneously.
 Therefore Tao produces them and virtue fosters them.
 They rear them and develop them.
 They give them security and give them peace.
 They nurture them and protect them.
 (Tao) produces them but does not take possession of them.
 It acts, but does not rely on its own ability.
 It leads them but does not master them.
 This is called profound and secret virtue.

FIFTY-TWO

Feng: The beginning of the universe
 Is the mother of all things.
 Knowing the mother, one also knows the sons.
 Knowing the sons, yet remaining in touch with the mother,
 Brings freedom from the fear of death.

Keep your mouth shut,
 Guard the senses,
 And life is ever full.

Open your mouth,
 Always be busy,
 And life is beyond hope.

Seeing the small is insight;
 Yielding to force is strength.
 Using the outer light, return to insight,
 And in this way be saved from harm.
 This is learning constancy.

Chan: There was a beginning of the universe
 Which may be called the Mother of the Universe.
 He who has found the mother (Tao)
 And thereby understands her sons (things)
 And having understood the sons,
 Still keeps to its mother,
 Will be free from danger throughout his lifetime.
 Close the mouth.
 Shut the doors (of cunning and desire).
 And to the end of life there will be (peace) without toil.
 Open the mouth.
 Meddle with affairs,
 And to the end of life there will be no salvation.
 Seeing what is small is called enlightenment.
 Keeping to weakness is called strength.
 Use the light.
 Revert to enlightenment,
 And thereby avoid danger to one's life—
 This is called practicing the eternal.

FIFTY-THREE

Feng: If I have even just a little sense,
 I will walk on the main road [Great Tao] and my only fear will be of straying from it.
 Keeping to the main road [Great Tao] is easy,
 But people love to be sidetracked.

When the court is arrayed in splendor,
 The fields are full of weeds,
 And the granaries are bare.
 Some wear gorgeous clothes,
 Carry sharp swords,
 And indulge themselves with food and drink;
 They have more possessions than they can use.
 They are robber barons.
 This is certainly not the way of Tao.

Chan: If I had but little knowledge
 I should, in walking on a broad way,
 Fear getting off the road.
 Broad ways are extremely even,
 But people are fond of by-paths.
 The courts are exceedingly splendid,
 While the fields are exceedingly weedy,
 And the granaries are exceedingly empty.
 Elegant clothes are worn,
 Sharp weapons are carried,
 Foods and drinks are enjoyed beyond limit,
 And wealth and treasures are accumulated in excess.
 This is robbery and extravagance.
 This is indeed not Tao (the way).

FIFTY-FOUR

Feng: What is firmly established cannot be uprooted.
 What is firmly grasped cannot slip away.
 It will be honored from generation to generation.

Cultivate Virtue in yourself,
 And Virtue will be real.
 Cultivate it in the family,
 And Virtue will abound.
 Cultivate it in the village,
 And Virtue will grow.
 Cultivate it in the nation,
 And Virtue will be abundant.
 Cultivate it in the universe,
 And Virtue will be everywhere.

Therefore look at the body as body;
 Look at the family as family;
 Look at the village as village;
 Look at the nation as nation;
 Look at the universe as universe.
 How do I know the universe is like this?
 By looking!

Chan: He who is well established (in Tao) cannot be pulled away.
 He who has a firm grasp (of Tao) cannot be separated from it.
 Thus from generation to generation his ancestral sacrifice
 will never be suspended.
 When one cultivates virtue in his person, it becomes genuine virtue.

When one cultivates virtue in his family, it becomes over-flowing virtue.

When one cultivates virtue in his community, it becomes lasting virtue.

When one cultivates virtue in his country, it becomes abundant virtue.

When one cultivates virtue in the world, it becomes universal.

Therefore the person should be viewed as a person.

The family should be viewed as a family.

The community should be viewed as a community.

The country should be viewed as a country.

And the world should be viewed as the world.

How do I know this to be the case in the world?

Through this (from the cultivation of virtue in the person to that in the world).