

The Urban Well

The Mercy Seminar 2024, Term I.5

FIFTY-FIVE

Feng: He who is filled with Virtue is like a newborn child.
Wasps and serpents will not sting him;
Wild beasts will not pounce upon him;
He will not be attacked by birds of prey.
His bones are soft, his muscles weak,
But his grip is firm.
He has not experience the union of man and woman, but is whole.
His manhood is strong.
He screams all day without becoming hoarse.
This is perfect harmony.

Knowing harmony is constancy.
Knowing constancy is enlightenment.

It is not wise to rush about.
Controlling the breath causes strain.
If too much energy is used, exhaustion follows.
This is not the way of Tao.
Whatever is contrary to Tao will not last long.

Chan: He who possesses virtue in abundance
May be compared to an infant.
Poisonous insects will not sting him.
Fierce beasts will not seize him.
Birds of prey will not strike him.
His bones are weak, his sinews tender, but his grasp is firm.
He does not yet know the union of male and female,
But his organ is aroused.
This means that his essence is at its height.
He may cry all day without becoming hoarse,
This means that his (natural) harmony is perfect.
To know harmony means to be in accord with the eternal.
To be in accord with the eternal means to be enlightened.
To force the growth of life means ill omen.
For the mind to employ the vital force without restraint means violence.
After things reach their prime, they begin to grow old,
Which means being contrary to Tao.

Whatever is contrary to Tao will soon perish.

FIFTY-SIX

Feng: Those who know do not talk.
Those who talk do not know.

Keep your mouth closed.
Guard your senses.
Temper your sharpness.
Simplify your problems.
Mask your brightness.
Be at one with the dust of the earth.
This is primal union.

He who has achieved this state
Is unconcerned with friends and enemies,
With good and harm, with honor and disgrace.
This therefore is the highest state of man.

Chan: He who knows does not speak.
He who speaks does not know.
Close the mouth.
Shut the doors (of cunning and desires).
Blunt the sharpness.
Untie the tangles.
Soften the light.
Become one with the dusty world.
This is called profound identification.
Therefore it is impossible either to be intimate and close to him
or to be distant and indifferent to him.
It is impossible either to benefit him or to harm him,
It is impossible either to honor him or to disgrace him.
For this reason he is honored by the world.

FIFTY-SEVEN

Feng: Rule a nation with justice.
Wage war with surprise moves.
Become master of the universe without striving.
How do I know that this is so?
Because of this!

The more laws and restrictions there are,
The poorer people become.
The sharper men's weapons,

The more trouble in the land.
 The more ingenious and clever men are,
 The more strange things happen.
 The more rules and regulations,
 The more thieves and robbers.

Therefore the sage says:

I take no action and people are reformed.
 I enjoy peace and people become honest.
 I do nothing and people become rich.
 I have no desires and people return to the good and simple life.

Chan: Govern the state with correctness.
 Operate the army with surprise tactics.
 Administer the empire by engaging in no activity.
 How do I know that this should be so?

Through this:

The more taboos and prohibitions there are in the world,
 The poorer the people will be.
 The more sharp weapons the people have,
 The more troubled the state will be.
 The more cunning and skill man possesses,
 The more vicious things will appear.
 The more laws and orders are made prominent,
 The more thieves and robbers there will be.

Therefore the sage says:

I take no action and the people of themselves are transformed.
 I love tranquility and the people of themselves become correct.
 I engage in no activity and the people of themselves become prosperous.
 I have no desires and the people of themselves become simple.

FIFTY-EIGHT

Feng: When the country is ruled with a light hand
 The people are simple.
 When the country is ruled with severity,
 The people are cunning.

Happiness is rooted in misery.
 Misery lurks beneath happiness.
 Who knows what the future holds?
 There is no honesty.
 Honesty becomes dishonest.
 Goodness becomes witchcraft.
 Men's bewitchment lasts for a long time.
 Therefore the sage is sharp but not cutting,

Pointed but not piercing,
 Straightforward but not unrestrained,
 Brilliant but not blinding.

Chan: When the government is non-discriminative and dull,
 The people are contented and generous.
 When the government is searching and discriminative,
 The people are disappointed and contentious.
 Calamity is that upon which happiness depends;
 Happiness is that in which calamity is latent.
 Who knows when the limit will be reached?
 Is there no correctness (used to govern the world?)
 Then the correct again becomes the perverse
 And the good will again become evil.
 The people have been deluded for a long time.
 Therefore the sage is as pointed as a square but does not pierce.
 He is as acute as a knife but does not cut.
 He is as straight as an unbent line but does not extend.
 He is as bright as light but does not dazzle.

FIFTY-NINE

Feng: In caring for others and serving heaven,
 There is nothing like using restraint.
 Restrain begins with giving up one's own ideas.
 This depends on Virtue gathered in the past.
 If there is a good store of Virtue, then nothing is impossible.
 If nothing is impossible, then there are no limits.
 If a man knows no limits, then he is fit to be a ruler.
 The mother principle of ruling holds good for a long time.
 This is called having deep roots and a firm foundation,
 The Tao of long life and eternal vision.

Chan: To rule people and to serve Heaven
 there is nothing better than to be frugal.
 Only by being frugal can one recover quickly.
 To recover quickly means to accumulate virtue heavily.
 By the heavy accumulation of virtue one can overcome everything.
 If one can overcome everything,
 then he will acquire a capacity the limit of which is beyond anyone's knowledge.
 When his capacity is beyond anyone's knowledge,
 he is fit to rule a state.
 He who possesses the Mother (Tao) of the state will last long.
 This means that the roots are deep and the stalks are firm,
 which is the way of long life and everlasting existence.

SIXTY

Feng: Ruling the country is like cooking a small fish.
 Approach the universe with Tao,
 And evil will have no power.
 Not that evil is not powerful,
 But its power will not be used to harm others.
 Not only will it do no harm to others,
 But the sage himself will also be protected.
 They do not hurt each other,
 And the Virtue in each one refreshes both.

Chan: Ruling a big country is like cooking a small fish.
 If Tao is employed to rule the empire,
 Spiritual beings will lose their supernatural power.
 Not that they lose their spiritual power,
 But their spiritual power can no longer harm people.
 Not only will their supernatural power not harm people,
 But the sage also will not harm people.
 When both do not harm each other,
 Virtue will be accumulated in both for the benefit [of the people].

SIXTY-ONE

Feng: A great country is like low land.
 It is the meeting ground of the universe,
 The mother of the universe.

The female overcomes the male with stillness,
 Lying low in stillness.

Therefore if a great country gives way to a smaller country,
 It will conquer the smaller country.
 And if a small country submits to a great country,
 It can conquer the great country.
 Therefore those who would conquer must yield,
 And those who conquer do so because they yield.

A great nation needs more people;
 A small country needs to serve.
 Each gets what it wants.
 It is fitting for a great nation to yield.

Chan: A big country may be compared to the lower part of a river.
 It is the converging point of the world;
 It is the female of the world.
 The female always overcomes the male by tranquility,

And by tranquility she is underneath.
 A big state can take over a small state if it places itself
 below the small state;
 And the small state can take over a big state
 if it places itself below the big state.
 Thus some, by placing themselves below, take over (others),
 And some, by being (naturally) low, take over (other states).
 After all, what a big state wants is but to annex and herd others,
 And what a small state wants is merely to join and serve others.
 Since both big and small states get what they want,
 The big state should place itself low.

SIXTY-TWO

Feng: Tao is the source of the ten thousand things.
 It is the treasure of the good man, and the refuge of the bad.
 Sweet words can buy honor;
 Good deeds can gain respect.
 If a man is bad, do not abandon him.
 Therefore on the day the emperor is crowned,
 Or the three officers of state installed,
 Do not send a gift of jade and a team of four horses,
 But remain still and offer the Tao.
 Why does everyone like the Tao so much at first?
 Isn't it because you find what you seek and are forgiven when you sin?
 Therefore this is the greatest treasure of the universe.

Chan: Tao is the storehouse of all things.
 It is the good man's treasure and the bad man's refuge.
 Fine words can buy honor,
 And fine deeds can gain respect from others.
 Even if a man is bad, when has (Tao) rejected him?
 Therefore on the occasion of crowning an emperor
 or installing the three ministers,
 Rather than present large pieces of jade preceded by teams of four horses,
 It is better to kneel and offer this Tao.
 Why did the ancients highly value this Tao?
 Did they not say, "Those who seek shall have it
 and those who sin shall be freed"?
 For this reason it is valued by the world.

SIXTY-THREE

Feng: Practice non-action.
 Work without doing.
 Taste the tasteless.

Magnify the small, increase the few.
Reward bitterness with care.

See simplicity in the complicated.
Achieve greatness in little things.

In the universe the difficult things are done as if they are easy.
In the universe great acts are made up of small deeds.
The sage does not attempt anything very big,
And thus achieves greatness.

Easy promises make for little trust.
Taking things lightly results in great difficulty.
Because the sage always confronts difficulties,
He never experiences them.

Chan: Act without action.
Do without ado.
Taste without tasting.
Whether it is big or small, many or few, repay hatred with virtue.
Prepare for the difficult while it is still easy.
Deal with the big while it is still small.
Difficult undertakings have always started with what is easy,
And great undertakings have always started with what is small.
Therefore the sage never strives for the great,
And thereby the great is achieved.
He who makes rash promises surely lacks faith.
He who takes things too easily will surely encounter much difficulty.
For this reason even the sage regards things as difficult,
And therefore he encounters no difficulty.

SIXTY-FOUR

Feng: Peace is easily maintained;
Trouble is easily overcome before it starts.
The brittle is easily shattered;
The small is easily scattered.

Deal with it before it happens.
Set things in order before there is confusion.

A tree as great as a man's embrace springs from a small shoot;
A terrace nine stories high begins with a pile of earth;

A journey of a thousand miles starts under one's feet.

He who acts defeats his own purpose;
 He who grasps loses.
 The sage does not act, and so is not defeated.
 He does not grasp and therefore does not lose.

People usually fail when they are on the verge of success.
 So give as much care to the end as to the beginning;
 Then there will be no failure.

Therefore the sage seeks freedom from desire.
 He does not collect precious things.
 He learns not to hold on to ideas.
 He brings men back to what they have lost.
 He helps the ten thousand things find their own nature,
 But refrains from action.

Chan: What remains still is easy to hold.
 What is not yet manifest is easy to plan for.
 What is brittle is easy to crack.
 What is minute is easy to scatter.
 Deal with things before they appear.
 Put things in order before disorder arises.
 A tree as big as a man's embrace grows from a tiny shoot.
 A tower of nine storeys begins with a heap of earth.
 The journey of a thousand *li* starts from where one stands.
 He who takes an action fails.
 He who grasps things loses them.
 For this reason the sage takes no action and therefore does not fail.
 He grasps nothing and therefore he does not lose anything.
 People in their handling of affairs often fail
 when they are about to succeed.
 If one remains as careful at the end as he was at the beginning,
 there will be no failure.
 Therefore the sage desires to have no desire.
 He does not value rare treasures.
 He learns to be unlearned,
 and returns to what the multitude has missed (Tao).
 Thus he supports all things in their natural state
 but does not take any action.

SIXTY-FIVE

Feng: In the beginning those who knew the Tao did not try to enlighten others,
 But kept them in the dark.
 Why is it so hard to rule?
 Because people are so clever.

Rulers who try to use cleverness
 Cheat the country.
 Those who rule without cleverness
 Are a blessing to the land.
 These are the two alternatives.
 Understanding these is Primal Virtue.
 Primal Virtue is deep and far.
 It leads all things back
 Toward the great oneness.

Chan: In ancient times those who practiced Tao well
 Did not seek to enlighten the people, but to make them ignorant.
 People are difficult to govern because they have too much knowledge.
 Therefore he who rules the state through knowledge
 is a robber of the state;
 He who rules a state not through knowledge
 is a blessing to the state.
 One who knows these two things also (knows) the standard.
 Always to know the standard is called profound and secret virtue.
 Virtue becomes deep and far-reaching,
 And with it all things return to their original natural state.
 Then complete harmony will be reached.

SIXTY-SIX

Feng: Why is the sea king of a hundred streams?
 Because it lies below them.
 Therefore it is the king of a hundred streams.

If the sage would guide the people, he must serve with humility.
 If he would lead them, he must follow behind.
 In this way when the sage rules, the people will not feel oppressed;
 When he stands before them, they will not be harmed.
 The whole world will support him and will not tire of him.

Because he does not compete,
 He does not meet competition.

Chan: The great rivers and seas are kings of all mountain streams
 Because they skillfully stay below them.
 That is why they can be their kings.
 Therefore, in order to be the superior of the people,
 One must, in the use of words, place himself below them.
 And in order to be ahead of the people,
 One must, in one's own person, follow them.
 Therefore the sage places himself above the people and

they do not feel his weight.
 He places himself in front of them and the people do not harm him.
 Therefore the world rejoices in praising him without getting tired of it.
 It is precisely because he does not compete
 that the world cannot compete with him.

SIXTY-SEVEN

Feng: Everyone under heaven says that my Tao is great and beyond compare.
 Because it is great, it seems different.
 If it were not different, it would have vanished long ago.

I have three treasures which I hold and keep.
 The first is mercy; the second is economy;
 The third is daring not to be ahead of others.
 From mercy comes courage; from economy comes generosity;
 From humility comes leadership.

Nowadays men shun mercy, but try to be brave;
 They abandon economy, but try to be generous;
 They do not believe in humility, but always try to be first.
 This is certain death.

Mercy brings victory in battle and strength in defense.
 It is the means by which heaven saves and guards.

Chan: All the world says that my Tao is great and
 does not seem to resemble (the ordinary).
 It is precisely because it is great that it does not resemble (the ordinary).
 If it did resemble, it would have been small for a long time.
 I have three treasures. Guard and keep them:
 The first is deep love,
 The second is frugality,
 And the third is not to dare to be ahead of the world.
 Because of deep love, one is courageous.
 Because of frugality, one is generous.
 Because of not daring to be ahead of the world,
 one becomes the leader of the world.
 Now, to be courageous by forsaking deep love,
 To be generous by forsaking frugality,
 And to be ahead of the world by forsaking following behind—
 This is fatal.
 For deep love helps one to win in the case of attack,
 And to be firm in the case of defense.
 When Heaven is to save a person,
 Heaven will protect him through deep love.

SIXTY-EIGHT

Feng: A good soldier is not violent.
A good fighter is not angry.
A good winner is not vengeful.
A good employer is humble.
This is known as the Virtue of not striving.
This is known as ability to deal with people.
This since ancient times has been known
as the ultimate unity with people.

Chan: A skillful leader of troops is not oppressive with his military strength.
A skillful fighter does not become angry.
A skillful conqueror does not compete with people.
One who is skillful in using men puts himself below them.
This is called the virtue of not-competing.
This is called the strength to use men.
This is called matching Heaven, the highest principle of old.