

The Urban Well

The Mercy Seminar 2024, Term I.6

SIXTY-NINE

Feng: There is a saying among soldiers:
I dare not make the first move but would rather play the guest;
I dare not advance an inch but would rather withdraw a foot.

This is called marching without appearing to move,
Rolling up your sleeves without showing your arm,
Capturing the enemy without attacking,
Being armed without weapons.

There is no greater catastrophe than underestimating the enemy.
By underestimating the enemy, I almost lose what I value.

Therefore when the battle is joined,
The underdog will win.

Chan: The strategists say:
"I dare not take the offensive but I take the defensive;
I dare not advance an inch but I retreat a foot."

This means:
To march without formation,
To stretch one's arm without showing it,
To confront enemies without seeming to meet them,
To hold weapons without seeming to have them.
There is no greater disaster than to make light of the enemy.
Making light of the enemy will destroy my treasures.
Therefore when armies are mobilized and issues joined,
The man who is sorry over the fact will win.

SEVENTY

Feng: My words are easy to understand and easy to perform,
Yet no man under heaven knows them or practices them.

My words have ancient beginnings.
My actions are disciplined.
Because men do not understand, they have no knowledge of me.

Those that know me are few;
 Those that abuse me are honored.
 Therefore the sage wears rough clothing and holds the jewel in his heart.

Chan: My doctrines are very easy to understand and very easy to practice,
 But none in the world can understand or practice them.
 My doctrines have a source (Nature); my deeds have a master (Tao).
 It is because people do not understand this that they do not understand me.
 Few people know me, and therefore I am highly valued.
 Therefore the sage wears a coarse cloth on top and carries jade within his bosom.

SEVENTY-ONE

Feng: Knowing ignorance is strength.
 Ignoring knowledge is sickness.

If one is sick of sickness, then one is not sick.
 The sage is not sick because he is sick of sickness.
 Therefore he is not sick.

Chan: To know that you do not know is the best.
 To pretend to know when you do not know is a disease.
 Only when one recognizes this disease as a disease
 can one be free from the disease.
 The sage is free from the disease.
 Because he recognizes this disease to be disease, he is free from it.

SEVENTY-TWO

Feng: When men lack a sense of awe, there will be disaster.

Do not intrude in their homes.
 Do not harass them at work.
 If you do not interfere, they will not weary of you.

Therefore the sage knows himself but makes no show,
 Has self-respect but is not arrogant.
 He lets go of that and chooses this.

Chan: When the people do not fear of what is dreadful,
 Then what is greatly dreadful will descend on them.
 Do not reduce the living space of their dwellings.
 Do not oppress their lives.
 It is because you do not oppress them that they are not oppressed.
 Therefore the sage knows himself but does not show himself.
 He loves himself but does not exalt himself.

Therefore he rejects the one but accepts the other.

SEVENTY-THREE

Feng: A brave and passionate man will kill or be killed.
 A brave and calm man will always preserve life.
 Of these two which is good and which is harmful?
 Some things are not favored by heaven. Who knows why?
 Even the sage is unsure of this.

The Tao of heaven does not strive, and yet it overcomes.
 It does not speak, and yet is answered.
 It does not ask, yet is supplied with all its needs.
 It seems at ease, and yet it follows a plan.

Heaven's net casts wide.
 Though its meshes are coarse, nothing slips through.

Chan: He who is brave in daring will be killed.
 He who is brave in not daring will live.
 Of these two, one is advantageous and one is harmful.
 Who knows why Heaven dislikes what it dislikes?
 Even the sage considers it a difficult question.
 The Way of Heaven does not compete, and yet it skillfully achieves victory.
 It does not speak, and yet it skillfully responds to things.
 It comes to you without your invitation.
 It is not anxious about things and yet it plans well.
 Heaven's net is indeed vast.
 Though its meshes are wide, it misses nothing.

SEVENTY-FOUR

Feng: If men are not afraid to die,
 It is of no avail to threaten them with death.

If men live in constant fear of dying,
 And if breaking the law means that a man will be killed,
 Who will dare to break the law?

There is always an official executioner.
 If you try to take his place,
 It is like try to be a master carpenter and cutting wood.
 If you try to cut wood like a master carpenter,
 you will only hurt your hand.

Chan: The people are not afraid of death.

Why, then, threaten them with death?
 Suppose the people are always afraid of death and
 we can seize those who are vicious and kill them,
 Who would dare to do so?
 There is always the master executioner (Heaven) who kills.
 To undertake executions for the master executioner is like
 hewing wood for the master carpenter.
 Whoever undertakes to hew wood for the master carpenter
 rarely escapes injuring his own hands.

SEVENTY-FIVE

Feng: Why are the people starving?
 Because the rulers eat up the money in taxes.
 Therefore the people are starving.

Why are the people rebellious?
 Because the rulers interfere too much.
 Therefore they are rebellious.

Why do the people think so little of death?
 Because the rulers demand too much of life.
 Therefore the people take death lightly.

Having little to live on, one knows better than to value life too much.

Chan: The people starve because the ruler eats too much tax-grain.
 Therefore they starve.
 They are difficult to rule because their ruler does too many things.
 Therefore they are difficult to rule.
 The people take death lightly because their ruler strives for life too vigorously.
 Therefore they take death lightly.
 It is only those who do not seek after life that excel in making life valuable.

SEVENTY-SIX

Feng: A man is born gentle and weak.
 At his death he is hard and stiff.
 Green plants are tender and filled with sap.
 At their death they are withered and dry.

Therefore the stiff and unbending is the disciple of death.
 The gentle and yielding is the disciple of life.

Thus an army without flexibility never wins a battle.
 A tree that is unbending is easily broken.

The hard and strong will fall.
The soft and weak will overcome.

Chan: When man is born, he is tender and weak.
At death, he is stiff and hard.
All things, the grass as well as trees, are tender and supple while alive.
When dead, they are withered and dried.
Therefore the stiff and the hard are companions of death.
The tender and the weak are companions of life.
Therefore if the army is strong, it will not win.
If a tree is stiff, it will break.
The strong and the great are inferior,
while the tender and the weak are superior.

SEVENTY-SEVEN

Feng: The Tao of heaven is like the bending of a bow.
The high is lowered, and the low is raised.
If the string is too long, it is shortened;
If there is not enough, it is made longer.

The Tao of heaven is to take from those who have too much
and give to those who do not have enough.
Man's way is different.
He takes from those who do not have enough
to give to those who already have too much.
What man has more than enough and gives it to the world?
Only the man of Tao.

Therefore the sage works without recognition.
He achieves what has to be done without dwelling on it.
He does not try to show his knowledge.

Chan: Heaven's Way is indeed like the bending of a bow.
When (the string) is high, bring it down.
When it is low, raise it up.
When it is excessive, reduce it.
When it is insufficient, supplement it.
The Way of Heaven reduces whatever is excessive
and supplements whatever is insufficient.
The way of man is different.
It reduces the insufficient to offer to the excessive.
Who is able to have excess to offer to the world?
Only the man of Tao.
Therefore the sage acts, but does not rely on his own ability.

He accomplishes his task, but does not claim credit for it.
He has no desire to display his excellence.

SEVENTY-EIGHT

Feng: Under heaven nothing is more soft and yielding than water.
Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better;
It has no equal.
The weak can overcome the strong;
The supple can overcome the stiff.
Under heaven everyone knows this,
Yet no one puts it into practice.
Therefore the sage says:
 He who takes upon himself the humiliation of the people
 is fit to rule them.
 He who takes upon himself the country's disasters deserves
 to be king of the universe.
The truth often sounds paradoxical.

Chan: There is nothing softer and weaker than water,
And yet there is nothing better for attacking hard and strong things.
For this reason there is no substitute for it.
All the world knows that the weak overcomes the strong
 and the soft overcomes the hard.
But none can practice it.
Therefore the sage says:
 He who suffers disgrace for his country
 Is called the lord of the land.
 He who takes upon himself the country's misfortunes
 Becomes the king of the empire.
Straight words seem to be their opposite.

SEVENTY-NINE

Feng: After a bitter quarrel, some resentment must remain.
What can one do about it?
Therefore the sage keeps his half of the bargain
But does not exact his due.
A man of Virtue performs his part,
But a man without Virtue requires others to fulfill their obligations.
The Tao of heaven is impartial.
It stays with good men all the time.

Chan: To patch up great hatred is surely to leave some hatred behind.

How can this be regarded as good?
 Therefore the sage keeps the left-hand portion (obligation) of a contract
 And does not blame the other party.
 Virtuous people attend to their left-hand portions,
 While those without virtue attend to other people's mistakes.
 "The Way of Heaven has no favorites. It is always with the good man."

EIGHTY

Feng: A small country has fewer people.
 Though there are machines that can work ten to a hundred times faster
 than man, they are not needed.
 The people take death seriously and do not travel far.
 Though they have boats and carriages, no one uses them.
 Though they have armor and weapons, no one displays them.
 Men return to the knotting of rope in place of writing.
 Their food is plain and good, their clothes fine but simple,
 their homes secure;
 They are happy in their ways.
 Though they live within sight of their neighbors,
 And crowing cocks and barking dogs are heard across the way,
 Yet they leave each other in peace while they grow old and die.

Chan: Let there be a small country with few people.
 Let there be ten times and a hundred times as many utensils
 But let them not be used.
 Let the people value their lives highly and not migrate far.
 Even if there are ships and carriages, none will ride in them.
 Even if there are armor and weapons, none will display them.
 Let the people again knot cords and use them (in place of writing).
 Let them relish their food, beautify their clothing,
 be content with their homes, and delight in their customs.
 Though neighboring communities overlook one another
 and the crowing of cocks and barking of dogs can be heard,
 Yet the people there may grow old and die without ever visiting one another.

EIGHTY-ONE

Feng: Truthful words are not beautiful.
 Beautiful words are not truthful.
 Good men do not argue.
 Those who argue are not good.
 Those who know are not learned.
 The learned do not know.

The sage never tries to store things up.

The more he does for others, the more he has.
 The more he gives to others, the greater his abundance.
 The Tao of heaven is pointed but does no harm.
 The Tao of the sage is work without effort.

Chan: True words are not beautiful;
 Beautiful words are not true.
 A good man does not argue;
 He who argues is not a good man.
 A wise man has no extensive knowledge;
 He who has extensive knowledge is not a wise man.
 The sage does not accumulate for himself.
 The more he uses for others, the more he has himself.
 The more he gives to others, the more he possesses of his own.
 The Way of Heaven is to benefit others and not to injure.
 The Way of the sage is to act but not to compete.

The Book of Chuang Tzu

xiii.1

The sage is still not because he takes stillness to be good and therefore is still. The ten thousand things are insufficient to distract his mind—that is the reason he is still.

Water that is still gives back a clear image of beard and eyebrows; reposing in the water level, it offers a measure to the great carpenter.
 And if water in stillness possesses such clarity, how much more must pure spirit. The sage's mind in stillness is the mirror of Heaven and earth, the glass of the ten thousand things.

Emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction—these are the level of Heaven and earth, the substance of the Way [Tao] and its Virtue [Te]. Therefore the emperor, the king, the sage rest in them. Resting, they may be empty; empty, they may be full, and fullness is completion. Empty, they may be still; still, they may move; moving, they may acquire. Still, they may rest in inaction; resting in inaction, they may demand success from those who are charged with activities. Resting in inaction, they may be merry; being merry, they may shun the place of care and anxiety, and the years of their life will be long.

Emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction are the root of the ten thousand things.

xxv.11

“The perfection of the Way [Tao] and things—neither words nor silence are worthy of expressing it. Not to talk, not to be silent—this is the highest form of debate.”