

11/11/20

Tao Te Ching Class Notes, verse 42

Our dear dog Lucy attended the class, since she loves it and its people, and she was in her last hours of life. Lucy is undoubtedly a Divine Being. Though in extremis, she watched us with close attention from first to last. In the past, if allowed to attend, she would jump up at the chanting, come over and put a paw on each of my shoulders, and start licking my face. She was therefore banned for excess of enthusiasm.

When the computer class was shut off, she got up, slowly and painfully, and went under the piano, her favorite spot, looking at me invitingly. I played the full Waldstein sonata of Beethoven, surely music from the gates of heaven, and an ecstatic blanket of sound if you're lucky enough to be directly under it. Afterwards, the Compassionate Care vet came and administered the fatal dose. She died still pondering how she could care for us.

Lucy and I were incredibly close, almost one person at times, and I'm rent apart, even as the joy soars. I spent the morning digging her grave and burying her, with Deb and Harmony in attendance for the final ceremony. I'll do my best to catch the flavor of the wonderful last class Lucy shared. There will definitely be a notice about her passing, with pictures, to the regular email list, which you may request.

As to verse 42, all versions start pretty much the same: The Tao gives birth to one, one gives birth to two, two to three, and three to the ten thousand things.

In his end note, Mitchell reminds us that as soon as it's called one, it is no longer the Tao, and for that matter, as soon as it's called the Tao, it is no longer the Tao.

The series 1, 2 and 3 likely derives from the Indian systems. Duyvendak (in Minford) tell us:

The One, the Unity, of the Tao operates through the duality of Yin and Yang. Yin is the dark, cold, feminine, passive category. Yang is the light, warm masculine, active category. The Three probably refers to Heaven, Earth, and Man. From these Three, all things, the Myriad Things, proceed.

Vedanta has several versions of the triad. Lately in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad study group, we've encountered it as devas, asuras and humanity, in other words, gods (creatures of light), demons (dark beings), and humans. The three gunas are often related in a similar way. Usually the triad is heaven, earth, and the in-between. In short, the duality produces a threefold system that is the basis of general classification of the myriad existences.

All the way through the verse there is substantial uniformity, except for the Minford where he improvises the last part, adding the original in his end note. Next, there is male, sunny, yang ahead; with yin, shaded, female behind, with various degrees of implicit prejudice. In between the yin and yang (which would be where the *person* is), breath unites them in harmony.

Uniting harmony is the crucial point, once we have begun to grow out of our Source. Minford cites the I Ching:

When Yin and Yang Energies join, when Hard and Soft unite, then is Substance Attained. One Yin, One Yang! They need each other, they work together. Know this Tao, and you will be happy and strong! You will Live Long, and be Beautiful!

In Pine, Lu Hui-Ching says: "Dark and unfathomable is *yin*. Bright and perceptible is *yang*. As soon as we are born, we all turn our back on the dark and unfathomable *yin* and turn toward the bright

and perceptible *yang*. Fortunately, we keep ourselves in harmony with the breath between them.”

Breath is key to the union. The *Yunchi Chichien*, cited in Pine, says: “When breath is pure, it becomes Heaven. When it becomes turgid, it becomes Earth. And the mixture of the breath between them becomes Humankind.”

The third section has kings, princes, or simply people, depending on the translator, professing humility in terms the world hates: being orphaned, widowed, or destitute—categories that were introduced in verse 39. Somehow the high professing to be low leads to the principle that some gain by losing and others lose by gaining.

Lao Tzu closes noting an ancient affirmation that tyrants or violent people die violently, or at least never choose their own death, and tells us he is in complete agreement. That’s what he teaches too.

The River Master is in accord:

Some teach others to abandon the Soft for the Hard. I teach them to abandon Violence, to abandon the Hard and Cleave to the Soft. The Violent do not Trust in Deep Mysteries, they rebel against the Tao and the Power, they do not follow the True Teaching.

Needleman’s end note is likewise germane:

From the one the universe is created and at all levels of the world all phenomena are the result of the harmonization of two opposing forces. The foolish identify with one force and are defeated by the counterforce. This is “violence.” The wise do not seek to triumph in this way.

Wang P'ang tells us what to do about violence: "Whatever contains the truth can be our teacher. Although tyrants kill others and are the most hated of creatures, we can learn the principle of creation and destruction from them." Might as well get *something* out of the massacres.

Deb began the discussion acknowledging the several beautiful and powerful messages in this verse. Most importantly, things are not always how they seem to us. We believe we see the 10,000 things but behind them all is the unnamed Tao. That means the world has a broader span than we think it does, and those things can and do turn into their opposite. We think we have a thing pigeonholed and then there is an unanticipated change. It reminded her of the graphic of the yin and yang, how they are in a kind of embrace, switching into each other in opposite ways.

I felt that the oscillation was why people who are most successful compensate for it by downplaying what they are, being modest about it, to balance their yin/yang. In our commercial world, success is more based on how loudly you can proclaim and even lie about your abilities, trumpeting it hither and yon to trump the competition, which accentuates the disharmony. According to Lao Tzu such a one is bound to come to a bad end. As LeGuin puts it, violence and aggression / destroy themselves.

Jan agreed that humbling yourself is not well developed in our society. One-sidedness doesn't seem compassionate to her. She hoped we could find ways that fully balance the yang exaggerations of the present time.

Jan's plea got me wondering. Taoism seems almost tangential to the thrust of modern civilization, and I asked the group how it could possibly fit into the society we have, which is so one-sided. It's an important question. We have people amassing wealth at the expense of everyone else, not to mention the planet, and it's made to look like unalloyed success, when it's utterly lopsided and unfair. Andy added that it's unsustainable, and surely

that is being proved beyond any reasonable doubt. So how exactly does this Taoist stuff work?

Nancy felt this is about more than just our day-to-day way of living, we can apply it over hundreds and thousands of years. What's looking really awful now will eventually be overcome by the other side.

It's pacifying to think in those terms, but isn't there anything we can do now? Do we have to wait for the Tao, to whom a million years is no more than a watch in the night? I spoke for Anita, who didn't join, guessing she'd be one whose activism was affronted by a literal reading. It's most important we are able to see how our hopes and wisdom can be a part of the arc of history. Right now we have millions of people putting in so much effort toward justice and planetary health, and it's getting thwarted in every meaningful way by pure greed.

One of us, I'm not sure who, felt the verse is advocating a more trusting spirit, to keep moving forward in your love and care for others and for the earth and the things you believe in. We don't have to feel as if we have to fix it all from scratch, that there's a flow still alive in the world that we can link up with.

Deb put in, while it's slightly different in the various versions, the sage has the yin in back and the brilliance of the yang in front, and it's the breath of the sage that creates the balance and harmony. It means we can look toward the positive goals, yet also feel the impulse coming from behind, or better, within, free of our intentional, often inadequate, programs.

Andy went so far as to say following a fixed way is the method of tyranny. The tyrant of the verse, then, is our unyielding, implacable attitude, which tunes out the contrary whisperings from the Tao. Our psyche has the same properties as the outer world, dynamic, turbulent and changeable, and the Taoist completely acknowledges that.

Moreover, the society we live in is a construct, meaning our moment-to-moment experience of it is full of evil and it's positively directed. Therefore the relationship of a Taoist is never fixed in relation to society.

Deb lamented how we're all in this headset of difficulty with accepting each other, which means we are in a superficial frame of reference. The Tao includes both beneficent actions and nefarious dealings, so it is not a philosophy to make our everyday life perfect.

I've been amazed lately at how quickly the civilization I grew up assuming was real has vanished like a whisp of smoke into thin air. Although our venerable civilization is disappearing, we are still here and are finding ways to function. It's exactly what the philosophy has always told us, though we may not have realized how thoroughgoing the deception was. Now we have to let go of much we relied on, since it's already gone for good. Some things may be built back up, but many won't, and we will hardly be the determiners of how it goes.

The US became the leading empire of history as well as the most repressive force ever. As it increases beyond all balance in male energy it is simultaneously falling to dust. I felt Andy was spot on that our wanting to direct the Tao to rotate in a certain form is tyrannical. We want a certain outcome, but all those certain outcomes are in conflict with each other, and dissipate their energies in futility.

Susan broke in that she was still going to write letters to stop climate change, etc. and that's important. We want to do *something*. Making a contribution to a cause need not be tyrannical. Being inflexible is. When we are disappointed that our efforts have no visible impact, we may retreat into rigid mindsets. This is precisely where the feminine (if you will), flowing, accepting, peacekeeping yin can be invited to seep in from behind,

as it were, to keep us in a state of loving kindness. As Deb put it, then we are going with a more profound current.

It's easy to be generous and loving when times are good. We need to retain those qualities when the chips are down, as they surely are now.

Bill added living your principles doesn't mean you accept things at face value, especially when confusion is the norm.

Deb responded that the right attitude here is to see something you love and follow it and you give yourself to it. You don't have control of how and why people will fight against it, you're just trying to be more in tune with it yourself.

Kris affirmed how lots of positive things have happened in this dark time. People who haven't had a voice now have more of a voice, but we have to realize there's always going to be a reaction to women and minorities having more of a voice.

I gave a kind of summation that the Tao is just, but humans trample on that all the time. Our longing and work for justice is just like wanting to be aligned with the Tao, and whenever our efforts stray from justice they stray from the Tao. Concern for Earth health is concern for justice for the rest of the planet, not just a few lucky humans.

Jan made the important point that validating the concerns of the other side is the way to not demonize them, and that helps us find that breath of harmony that unites.

So true! Demonizing the opposition may be a successful political technique, but it's poison to the soul. Our daughter Harmony has a close friend, the dog breeder she has used and has a great relationship with. She's a wonderful human being, yet she is a Trump supporter. Harmony is working to reconcile that disconnect, but it's taught her to not tar the whole fascist movement with the same brush. While propaganda is a major factor in deluding people, many of them have been beaten down by US economic policies that moved their jobs overseas and gave

them Walmart instead. Live better, indeed! The one with the loudest promises of restoring their dignity gets their vote, no matter if actually doing anything about it is the farthest thing from their agenda. Anyway, being open to the other is the way to keep our yins and yangs healthy and in concert with each other.

Andy could see how, although we believe ourselves to be morally in the right, we are inserting subtle violence with the pleasure we get when someone gets their comeuppance, for instance. He acknowledged a lot of Trump people aren't getting what they need, they aren't being nourished, so it's not surprising they are lashing out.

Our conclusion was essentially to be active and open. Watch yourself for the ways you close down and substitute mental imagery for reality. Why demonize people you've never met? That isn't even the issue. Hatred is a poor motivator; love is way better. Let love be your motivation, and the Tao will seep into your bones. Lucy would approve.

We ended meditating on a poem by eleventh century polymath Su Dongpo, from Minford, that suited our discussion admirably:

Great Calamity
Stems from
Possession of a body.
With no Body,
There is no illness.
With Calm,
Complete Illumination
Dawns
Of-Itself
Mirror upon Mirror—
The Mirror of No-Self,
Water cleansed with Water,

Two Waters,
One Purity.
One Vast Heart
Between Heaven and Earth,
Alone,
Upright.

Part II

Beverley's haiku:

When One became three
leading to all that is, life's
yin- yang begins, and

light-dark, male-female
energies dance endlessly
through time together.

* * *

The Chuang Tzu/Merton reading was *The Kingly Man*, p. 72
<https://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/MertonChuangTzu.pdf>.

Part III

From My chapter X Gita commentary:

Krishna has admitted to doing battle with evil too, in IV, 7 and 8. It does seem that when evil becomes all-powerful it is swept away by some inscrutable force. In the story of Devi, Vishnu

describes the trajectory of *asuras*, evildoers, eerily reminiscent of the power mongers of our day:

Every asura who acquires power goes through the same set of actions, of tormenting the gods, encouraging evil, and enjoying the pleasures of the senses. In addition to all this, they are strong-minded, intelligent, and capable of offering arguments to establish that they are righteous, and all others are evil-minded.

They succeed—but, as all the gods here are aware, only for awhile; sooner or later they are overcome.... Each one of them [is] capable of putting out the sun. (Gods, Demons and Others, retold by R.K. Narayan, New York: Viking Press, 1964, p.53)

Religion and warfare are alternating cyclic outbursts of human intentionality. That's why the Gita asks us as sincere seekers to defeat evil through the yoga of wisdom and compassionate action, not through direct confrontation. We are not the ones who cause power to wax and wane like the moon. That is purely a function of nature. Arjuna is learning the middle way between fighting and retreating in diffusing hostilities. Becoming united with the Absolute doesn't necessarily mean taking on all its innumerable exterior attributes, either.

Nitya Chaitanya Yati, referring to Narayana Guru's teaching, expresses perfectly what we have learned in the intervening 2500 years since the Gita was composed, with its advocacy of *ahimsa*, non-hurting:

Nobody wants to have factionalism, but even as you are attempting to bring unity, you become part of a faction. It is in the name of unity that you are creating all these factions in the first place....

So the true knower of this secret withholds from all disputes. [Narayana] Guru made this so central to his teaching because it is in the name of this one dispute that we have been killing each other since the dawn of human history. There has been more blood shed in the name of religion than there is water in the seven oceans put together. It is such an important question for all mankind. If the dignity of man is to be enhanced, we need to find a solution to this eternal riddle of man killing man in the name of an opinion. (*That Alone*, p. 322)