

11/17/20

Tao Te Ching Class Notes, verse 47

This verse, short yet pungent, has what may be the second best known line in spirituality: Without going out your door you can know the whole world. In Vedanta, by knowing one drop of water you already know the entire ocean. The farthest of the far is also the nearest of the near. It's all about bringing the presumed "outside" in, realizing we are the knower, known and knowledge, all rolled into one.

Most translations of this verse are quite similar. Mitchell adds knowing specifically in the core of our being: "Without opening your door, / you can open your heart to the world." Bill admitted to having a personal and immediate reaction to that line, how its uniqueness stood out for him.

After the door, the same is said for one of my favorite things: gazing out the window. You don't need to look outward to know the ways of Heaven. Yet, to me, if you gaze in the right way, you can, too.

The point is then underlined: the farther you go, the less you know. Mitchell puts it that the more stuff you know without knowing yourself, the less you understand. Once again, Know Thyself is the key.

Thus the wise know without traveling or going (Min, F, P), arrive without leaving (Mit), don't go, but know, (LG), do not venture forth, but know (H). They also see or see the light or understand, without looking (F, Mit, LG, Min), in some cases they *name* without seeing or looking (P, H). Lastly, they work or achieve without doing (F, Mit), don't do, but get it done (LG), don't strive but attain completion (H), accomplish without action (Min), and, to me, the best: succeed without trying (P).

In Pine, Wu Ch'eng is quoted saying: "To succeed without trying' is the result of the previous two lines. Because those sages

know everything without going anywhere and see everything without looking at anything, they succeed at everything without any effort at all.”

Jan drily commented it’s a good verse for now when we’re having to stay home all the time.

Deb led off our discussion noting how each example talks about ordinary activity where we *think* we are in accordance with the world, but the verse turns that around and tells us our understanding is coming from an inner apprehension. She remembered the way Thomas Merton once put it: we walk down the street and we think we know who we are simply because people call us by our name. That means we think we know the world because we see its outward form and can identify it with a word. Even for ourselves. Meditation takes us deeper than that, inside our very being.

After I prepped the class early in the day, I looked out the window and could see only a tiny bit of the world. I realized my conception of the world is much more vast than what I can see, from any vantage point. We develop the whole thing within ourselves, and unwittingly bring that in to our every perception.

Anita had computer problems earlier, and was not connected to the internet for most of her day. After churning over it for some time, she investigated and found the power had come unplugged, due to some banging in the apartment upstairs. All she had to do was plug it back in. She took it as an analogy for the class: the internet stands for all these connections: everything is out there, but it wasn’t there until she plugged back in to the source. It’s like the Tao, nothing exists unless you plug into it.

Electricity and spirit have often been conflated.

For some reason, back in the Sixties being “plugged in” was another name for being in tune. Maybe because electricity had just recently been discovered.... At least a new kind had. Anyway, it

reminded me of the first Zap Comix, with an R Crumb cover (linked in Part II) of an adult baby with umbilical cord plugged into an electrical outlet. It's "The comic that plugs you in!" Introducing Mr. Natural, a doppelganger of Nataraja Guru.

Anita wasn't sure that Zap Comix was in her wheelhouse, so she explained how sometimes she makes life more difficult than it needs to be. She's decided it's a matter of looking at everyday things with more awareness of their high value.

It's amazing what you can learn from an unplugged appliance!

Her account inspired Andy to read a section of *Mink River*, by Brian Doyle, where a man with six days left to live lists a great many simple, ordinary moments that enriched his life, exactly the kinds of things we take for granted. It's a fabulous example of how art stimulates us to stay more fully alive to the content of existence. We are far wealthier than we realize!

Andy couldn't decide if his reading was antithetical or "thetical" to the theme of the verse, so I assured him it was germane—all those images are so rich and they are our own, our world inside. They are surely a major part of our true wealth. Everyone would have a different image come to mind on hearing them, so the wealth does not reside in the objects or events Doyle listed, it's in the individual. It's not that Lao Tzu wants us to tune everything out, only that our inner world needs attending to, along with it.

Andy gratefully agreed. As those items were listed, he had had a meaningful experience of each of them in turn. It was what his life was full of. You read this and you realize your whole life you've been *aware*. It's a hymn about awareness. You realize you have had a rich experience of all of those things, hardly a grain of the 10,000 things, yet you are a parent of them. It wakes you up.

As Deb was listening to Andy read, she felt Doyle was evoking in every item the beauty of the Tao. They were floating

along on his love so they weren't separate. Andy agreed that in terms of opening your heart to the world, it is a song of open heartedness. (A Gita then.) Bill echoed that Brian Doyle really opens his heart. Which recalled Bergson to me: "The true mystic just opens their heart to the onrushing wave." Last night we were an open-hearted enclave.

Deb enthused how unhabitual is the way Doyle sees. She confessed to having a little anecdote about not being crystalized in a fixed form, and some other self-descriptive niceties. Recently she realized she told those same stories to herself so often they've become meaningless clichés, and she's swearing them off. She admires Doyle for what he does, never expressing anything out of habit, and that that's the essence of the Tao, that flowing living quality of being alert and intuitive in yourself.

We were all so touched by the excerpt I read out Doyle's Last Prayer, from his *Book of Uncommon Prayer, 100 Celebrations of the Miracle & Muddle of the Ordinary*. A touching glimpse(!) of him along with it may be savored here:

<https://orionmagazine.org/2017/07/brian-doyle-1956-2017/>

As Ho-Shang Kung, in Pine, says: "Those who are sages understand other individuals by understanding themselves. They understand other families by understanding their own family. Thus, they understand the whole world. Humankind and Heaven are linked to each other.... Sages do not have to ascend into the sky or descend into the depths to understand Heaven or Earth."

LeGuin's footnote speaks to the perplexity of those of us who love to travel to remote places and discover new worlds:

We tend to expect great things from "seeing the world" and "getting experience." A Roman poet remarked that travelers change their sky but not their soul. Other poets, untraveled and inexperienced, Emily Bronte and Emily Dickenson, prove Lao Tzu's point: it's the inner eye that really sees the world.

In synchrony, right after class Deb ran across a fragment from Emily Dickenson she felt spoke to the gist of the verse:

The Sailor cannot see the North-but knows the Needle can-

Isn't it curious how Dickenson uses caps in the Chinese style? The letter in which this appears is a breathtaking example of extreme modesty in the face of rejection, by the way:

<http://archive.emilydickinson.org/correspondence/higginson/1265.html> . The nineteenth century was not ready for Her!

Wang Pi says: "If we don't understand, going farther only leads us farther astray."

Another Pine sage, Su Ch'e, says: "The reason the sages of the past understood everything without going anywhere was simply because they kept their natures whole. People let themselves be misled by things and allow their natures to be split into ears and eyes, body and mind. Their vision becomes limited to sights, and their hearing becomes limited to sounds."

I voiced a concern that screens are the windows of today, and they are much more duplicitous than the old, regular windows opening onto a physical setting. I'm trying to apply the ancient wisdom for coping with the power of screens to manipulate us. Yes, they're fascinating and provide amazing opportunities, as Susan insisted, but because they're so close to us, they feel like they have to be true, even when they aren't. There's real danger here, and I'm not sure the people who need caution the most are using any.

Taoism telescopes reality back into us, so when we look out the window we can easily tell we are going away from our center, in a sense. Computers nestle right in our center with us, so unless we have a solid grounding in discriminating truth from falsehood, we are very vulnerable to exploitation. I feel if we don't cope with

it as a species, we are in for severe problems. Dismissing the danger, the way we do with advanced weaponry for the insane, nuclear power, carbon pollution, etc., will not help.

It may be humans are simply evolving into a new species, but I have my doubts. Regardless, I don't mind being in the left-behind category.

Anita had just watched a Senate hearing with social media CEOs, and was surprised by their open admission of the addictiveness of the internet. She realized she needs to examine herself as to what purpose it is serving in her life. It's so easily abused, we have to become more aware. It's a real issue for our times. We need to look within as we look without so we are aware of the impact of where we are putting our energy and attention.

It's mighty easy to just go along with it, to surf off into the sunset. I suggested the sense of unity saves everything. Without unity you can be drawn to duality, then multiplicity and dissolution. When we're home in our heart we are in unity, but going out away from unity leads us into the desert of the 10,000 soulless things. Without the exuberance of a Brian Doyle, without bringing our own soul to bear, we can get lost.

Jan agreed, when we're Home we're open to accessing that kind of intuitive understanding.

Deb felt part of what this verse is reminding us of, is that this unnamable, mysterious Tao is the thread that goes through everything that we are. If we see that rather than isolated opposites, it's how we get through on this intuitive river.

While yet again staring out the window, I had an insight about accomplishing without doing. When I go out to do yardwork, I can make a big deal out of it, talk my way through it, complain about this or that, describe and analyze my every movement. That makes it more of a boring chore. Or I can simply go out and take care of it, which makes it a joyous opportunity to interact with my

world. In the second case, I'm closer to experiential participation, the Tao if you will.

Still, Mr. Natural doesn't mind a little griping in a good cause, like when he does the dishes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhQoiAA0PuU> .

Minford once more gave us a spectacular stone-groove poem for meditation, from "The Complete Reality Taoist" Qiu Chuji (1148-1227):

The Sylph of the Grotto
Cries out
The name of Lao-Tzu,
Essence
Of Luminous Energy
Floating
In Splendor and Solitude.
From its exalted Height
The Sylph gazes down
On an Azure Sea,
Guarding an unruffled Silence
In the white clouds.

Part II

Beverley's haiku. She did another rather mysterious one, at no extra charge:

43

Unknown, behind the
world's kaleidoscopic scene,
Tao informs all things

Understanding this

onyx comes wordlessly to
the few who seek it.

47

Heart and mind can be
one with Heaven and Earth – how
beautiful this sounds.

* * *

For Chuang Tzu we read the marvellous Where is Tao?
again, on p. 123 at
<https://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/MertonChuangTzu.pdf>.

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The R Crumb cover of Zap Comix #0 can be viewed here:
https://www.abebooks.com/servlet/BookDetailsPL?bi=17864403672&cm_mmc=ggl-_-COM_Shopp_Rare-_-naa-_-naa&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIItbb-qr6M7QIVYgp9Ch0a7gtzEAQYAyABEgJVBPD_BwE#&gid=1&pid=1 . Click on image for a bigger picture.

The comic that plugs you in!

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Thanks to Magister Liu's frequent references to the True Breath-Energy (what we call prana), I recommended the new book *Breath*, by James Nestor. well written and presenting some fascinating science about breath, pranayama-like breathing simplified for anyone to try, that has been shown in studies to be healthy and healing.

