

VIII. Let's Talk About Righteous Desires and Good Deeds.

[FOREWARD]

There are two kinds of desires in mind: one is righteous desire, and the other is material (or selfish) desire. There are three levels of good deeds: superior good deeds, medium good deeds, and inferior good deeds. A cultivator of Tao should be able to recognize all of the above. The following is a detailed discussion of these things.

1. Righteous Desire

A. To be a cultivator of Tao, one should extinguish all material desires, pacify his mind, make his thoughts tranquil, reform his bad conduct, and follow the good ideas and perform accordingly. The exceptional person can be enlightened by performing all of these things, and he can become a Saint. However, normal people find difficulty in performing all these things, thus confusion always arises in their minds.

In actuality, it can be said that “a normal person is the same as a Saint”, and “Heaven is the same as annoyance.” If a person's mind is confused, then he is just a normal person, but when his mind is awakened and enlightened, then he is a Saint. When a person's thoughts are always involved with the material world, then this is called annoyance, but when his thoughts do not involve him in the material world, then this is called Heaven (in the mind).

Thus, a person should rid the three poisons (i.e. greed, anger, and stubborn ignorance) from his mind through these methods of cultivation: discipline wards off bodily greed, serenity calms the anger in the mind, and wisdom gets rid of stubborn ignorance and proves Truth. Thus a superior person can conquer material (or selfish) desires, but an inferior person always succumbs to material desires. Selfish desire is like a cloth which covers and conceals a person's conscience, and it is also the train that goes to Hell.

B. A person's mind will be narrow when there are desires present, and it will be broad when no desires exist. A person will be worried about the state of affairs in his mind when there are desires present, and it will be peaceful when there are no desires. A person's cleverness will be in danger when there are desires present, and it will be safe when no desire exists. A person's courage will be lacking when desires are present, and it will be filled when no desires exist. As a result a Saint is without desires, a sage has very few desires, a normal person has many desires, and an ignorant person is totally overwhelmed by desires. Accordingly, a person is possessed of the greatest strength if he can conquer his own selfish desires and can refrain from conquering other people.

C. The greatest sin of a person is to desire all things and the greatest disaster is to be unsatisfied about the things one already has. The greatest demerit is to speak badly of others. In fact, no matter a Saint or a normal person both have desires, but just one has good desires and the other has material desires.

Desire itself has no distinction between goodness and badness; its character depends solely on how a person makes use of it. It is similar to a person's hand, which can either be used to beat or hurt a person, or it can be used to massage a sore back.

D. The desires of the Saints and sages are all good. Confucius said, "The man of perfect virtue, who wishes to be accomplished in virtue, seeks also to help others to attain virtue; wishing to attain the perfect cultivation of himself, he seeks also to assist others to reach the perfect cultivation." Confucius also said, "I wish to act according to benevolence, and immediately benevolence appears in my conduct". Mencius said, "Allow your good desire to appear in your conduct." All these above are called good desires.

E. The desires of normal people are for prosperity, wealth, noble position, glory, fame, and so on; these are all called material desires.

F. A Saint and a normal person both have something they wish to contend for. A normal person contends for profits, and retains advantages and passes on disadvantages. But a Saint contends to perform good deeds, and to be behind none in the desire to benefit mankind. These are the differences between a Saint and a normal person.

If a person likes to fight for power, then really his mind is the weakest. If a person likes to contend for wealth, then his mind is the poorest. If a person struggles for authority, then his mind is always troubled. But if a person always contends to perform good deeds, then his mind is the happiest.

2. Good Deeds

- A. To be a cultivator of Tao, one should cease committing all sins, and perform only good deeds. What are good deeds? They are: to make one's own mind righteous, because this is the most basic good deed; to have a loyal and filial mind, because these are necessary good deeds for everybody; to maintain sincere belief and virtue, because these are the good deeds by which to conduct oneself in life; to guide and help others to cultivate themselves, because giving financial support, because this is the good deed of donation.
- B. A person is truly wealthy when his life is full of virtue; the true high position for a person is when one does good deeds and happily makes donations. These not only benefit others but are also advantageous to oneself. Hence, the more you do for others, the more you will own, and the more you give to others, the more you will have.

[FUTURE GOALS]

From now on, you should cultivate your mind and keep your soul tranquil, thus you should try to do the followings: tolerate the bitterness and hardship of work, endure insults and complaints, hold back anger and be patient, bear adversity from others, and accept annoyances and slander aimed at oneself. The best way to repay God's grace is to benefit the world and to guide and help others to cultivate themselves. The best way to repay Teacher's mercy is to nourish the next generation of cultivators.