

On Virtue (Jen)

Confucius said: At fifteen my heart was set on learning; at thirty I stood firm; at forty I had no more doubts; at fifty I knew the mandate of heaven; at sixty my ear was obedient; at seventy I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing [going against] the norm...Having virtue and not cultivating [pursuing] it; studying and not sifting [sorting out what is useful or valuable knowledge]; hearing what is just and not following it; not being able to change wrongdoing: these are the things that make me uncomfortable.

Tzu Chang asked Confucius about jen [virtue]. Confucius said, "If you can practice these five things with all the people, you can be called jen. Courtesy, generosity, honesty, persistence, and kindness. If you are courteous, you will not be disrespected; if you are generous, you will gain everything. If you are honest, people will rely on you. If you are persistent you will get results. If you are kind, you can employ people."

Tzu Kung asked: "Is there a single concept that we can take as a guide for the actions of our whole life?" Confucius said, "What about 'fairness'? What you don't like done to yourself, don't do to others."

Someone said: "What do you think of the saying: 'Repay harm with virtue'?" Confucius replied, "Then how will you repay virtue? Repay harm with Righteousness and repay virtue with virtue."

Confucius said: "Be aroused by poetry; structure yourself with propriety [ceremony, formality], refine yourself with music."

Yen Yuan asked about the meaning of jen. The Master said, "To completely overcome selfishness and keep propriety [decency or respectability] is jen. If for a full day you can overcome selfishness and keep propriety, everyone in the world will return to jen."

Tzu Lu asked about the meaning of filial piety. Confucius said, "Nowadays filial piety means being able to feed your parents. But everyone does this for even horses and dogs. Without respect, what's the difference? What is important is the expression you show in your face. You should not understand 'filial' to mean merely the young doing physical tasks for their parents...When you serve your mother and father it is okay to try to correct them once in a while. But if you see that they are not going to listen to you, keep your respect for them...Work without complaining."

The Superior Man [*the Superior Man in this sense means someone from the nobility who has made significant progress in the Way (Tao) of self-cultivation, by practicing Righteousness, by loving treatment of parents, respect for elders, honesty with friends and therefore serves as a model for others*].

The Superior Man treats people as human beings, and once they have corrected themselves, he lets them be. Being sincere and fair to all means "not doing to others what you don't want done to yourself." There are four general ways that this can be characterized:

- (1) Treating my father as I expect my son to treat me.
- (2) Treating my ruler as I expect my ministers to treat me.
- (3) Treating my older brothers as I expect my younger brothers to treat me.
- (4) Treating my friends as I expect my friends to treat me.

Confucius said: "Without recognizing the ordinances [rules] of Heaven, it is impossible to be a superior man. Riches and honors are what all men desire. But if they cannot be attained in accordance with the Tao [the laws of nature/natural order of the universe] they should not be kept....If a Superior Man departs from jen [virtue], how can he be worthy of that name? In times of

difficulty or confusion he acts according to it [virtue]."

Confucius said: "When the Superior Man deals with the world he is not prejudiced [biased] for or against anything. He does what is Right."

Confucius said: "The Superior Man cares about virtue; the inferior man cares about material things. The Superior Man seeks discipline; the inferior man seeks favors. The Superior Man is aware of Righteousness, the inferior man is aware of advantage [trying to gain for himself]. The Superior Man is self-confident without being arrogant. The inferior man is arrogant and lacks self-confidence...The Superior Man seeks within himself. The inferior man seeks within others."

Confucius said: "When you see a good person, think of becoming like her/him. When you see someone not so good, reflect on your own weak points. The Superior Man cultivates himself by comforting others."

Learning and Teaching

Confucius said, "By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they become wide apart [in ability/knowledge]. Those who are born with the possession of knowledge are the highest class of men. Those who learn, and readily get possession of knowledge, are the next. Those who are dull and stupid, and yet compass [try to master] learning are another class next to these. As to those who are dull and stupid and yet do not learn—they are the lowest of the people."

Confucius said: "In ancient times, men learned for their own improvement. Nowadays, men learn for the approbation [approval] of others. To have faults and not to reform them—this is the mark of a fool...The man who asks a question is a fool for a minute, the man who does not ask is a fool for life."

Government

Confucius said, "The requisites [requirements] of government are that there be sufficiency of food, sufficiency of military equipment, and the confidence of the people in their ruler...If the people have no faith in their rulers, there is no standing for the state."

Confucius said, "Let your evinced [stated] desires be for what is good, and the people will be good. The relation between superiors (*chün-tzu*) and inferiors is like that between the wind and the grass. The grass must bend, when the wind blows across it...If the people are led by laws and punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but [they will] have no sense of shame [for misbehavior]. If they are led by virtue and taught consistency by the rules of propriety [proper behavior], they will have a sense of shame and will seek improvement and propriety."

Confucius said, "If you put the honest in positions of power and discard the dishonest, you will force the dishonest to become honest. When a prince's [or ruler's] personal conduct is correct, his government is effective without the issuing of orders. If his personal conduct is not correct, he may issue orders, but they will not be followed."

Confucius said, "When a country is well governed, poverty and mean condition are things to be ashamed of. When a country is poorly governed, riches and honor are things to be ashamed of."