

Conversations for this week II are based on some of the poems and parables selected from the writings of Chuang Tzu (莊子) of 4th to 3rd Century B.C. was thought of as one of the greatest philosophers of ancient China. He is not particularly concerned with words of analytical sharpness on the formulas about reality, but with profound intuitive, existential grasp of reality of life in itself. Freedom, transparency, mystery-embracing are the undergirding themes for his parabolic, ecstatic, satirical and humorous style it articulates about life. To encounter awe with Chung Tzu is to allow yourself to take a relationship of kissing the Mystery, then deciding if "I dreamt the butterfly of the butterfly dream of me?"

### I. METAMORPHOSIS

- a. What are some of the imageries or metaphors you remember?
- b. When did you find your being was intrigued with strange feeling or humour?
- c. Where did you find yourself being caught by the mystery itself?
- d. What are some of the insights you picked up from the poem as metamorphosis the way mystery of life turns to be?

### II. THE SACRIFICIAL SWINE

- a. Any line, word, scene, picture you remember?
- b. What was the struggle of decision?
- c. Which side do you find yourself reflecting from--the grand Augur or from the pig's point of view.
- d. If you were the Grand Augur what decision would you make, why?
- e. What does this little story reveal to us about life struggle?

### III. CUTTING UP AN OX

- a. What words, lines, imagery do you remember?
- b. What are the processes of ox-cutting you remember?
- c. Where did you find yourself nodding, amazed, or laughing with the TAO the cook revealed?
- d. What does the story tell you about your life?

### IV. THREE FRIENDS

- a. What are some of the questions they raised about life you still remember?
- b. What was the song for the obsequies about? Is it a profound song? Why?
- c. What would you say is the problem the Confucius' disciple had?
- d. Why is it a problem in relation to life?

### V. THE FIGHTING COCK

- a. What are some "unready-to-fight" situations you remember?
- b. How would you interpret the journey of the cock training as a journey of man of spirit?
- c. What does the role of the trainer remind you of?
- d. What would you say the relationship between the generalship, the trainer and the trained cock!

### VI. THE FASTING OF THE HEART

- a. What tickled or surprised your mind as you listened to this short story?
- b. What kind of person was Yen Hui as you imagine him?

VI. THE FASTING OF THE HEART (continued)

- c. What are some of the "methods" Yen r tried to do?  
What are the dangers implied?
- d. What would you say about Confucius' suggestions or insights  
and the implications for your life?

I METAMORPHOSIS

Four men got in a discussion. Each one said:

"Who knows how  
To have the void for his head  
To have life as his backbone  
And death for his tail?  
He shall be my friend!"

At this they all looked at one another  
Saw they agreed,  
Burst out laughing  
And became friends.

Then one of them fell ill.  
And another went to see him.  
"Great is the Maker," said the sick one,  
"Who has made me as I am!"

"I am so doubled up  
My guts are over my head;  
Upon my navel  
I rest my cheek;  
My shoulders stand out  
Beyond my neck;  
My crown is an ulcer  
Surveying the sky;  
My body is chaos  
But my mind is in order."

He dragged himself to the well,  
Saw his reflection, and declared,  
"What a mess  
He has made of me!"

His friend asked:  
"Are you discouraged?"

"Not at all! Why should I be?  
If He takes me apart  
And makes a rooster  
Of my left shoulder  
I shall announce the dawn.  
If He makes a crossbow  
Of my right should  
I shall procure roast duck.  
If my buttocks turn into wheels  
And if my spirit is a horse  
I will hitch myself up and ride around  
In my own wagon!"

## I METAMORPHOSIS (continued)

"There is a time for putting together  
And another time for taking apart.  
He who understands  
This course of events  
Takes each new state  
In its proper time  
With neither sorrow nor joy."  
The ancients said: "The hanged man  
Cannot cut himself down!  
But in due time nature is stronger  
Than all his ropes and bonds  
It was always so.  
Where is there a reason  
To be discouraged?"

## II THE SACRIFICIAL SWINE

The Grand Augur, who sacrificed the swine and read omens in the sacrifice, came dressed in his long dark robes to the pigpen. And spoke to the pigs as follows: "Here is my counsel to you. Do not complain about having to die. Set your objections aside, please. Realize that I shall feed you on choice grain for three months. I myself will have to observe strict discipline for ten days and fast for three. Then I will lay out grass mats and offer your hams and shoulder upon delicately carved platters with great ceremony. What more do you want?"

Then reflecting, he considered the question from the pigs' point of view: "Of course, I suppose you would prefer to be fed with ordinary coarse food and be left alone in your pen.""

But again, seeing it once more from his own viewpoint, he replied: "No, definitely there is a nobler kind of existence! To live in honor, to receive the best treatment, to ride in a carriage with fine clothes, even though at any moment one may be disgraced and executed, that is the noble, though uncertain, destiny that I have chosen for myself."

So he decided against the pigs' point of view, and adopted his own point of view, both for himself and for the pigs also.

How fortunate those swine, whose existence was thus ennobled by one who was at once the officer of state and a minister of religion.

### III CUTTING UP AN OX

Prince Wen Huiscook  
Was cutting up an ox.  
Out went a hand,  
Down went a shoulder,  
He planted a foot,  
He pressed with a knee,  
The ox fell apart.  
With a whisper,  
The bright cleaver murmured  
Like a gentle wind.  
Rhythm! Timing!  
Like a sacred dance,  
Like "The Mulberry Grove,"  
Like ancient harmonies!

"Good work!" the prince exclaimed,  
"Your method is faultless!"  
"Method?" said the cook  
Laying aside his cleaver,  
"What I follow is TAO  
Beyond all methods!"

"When I first began  
To cut up oxen  
I would see before me  
The whole ox  
All in one mass.

"After three years  
I no longer saw this mass  
I saw the distinctions.  
But now, I see nothing  
With the eye. My whole being  
Apprehends.  
My senses are idle. The spirit  
Free to work without plan  
Follows its own instinct  
Guided by natural line,  
But the secret opening, the hidden space,  
My cleaver finds its own way.  
I cut through no joint, chop no bone.

"A good cook needs a new chopper  
Once a year--he cuts.  
A poor cook needs a new one  
Every month--he hacks.

### III CUTTING UP AN OX (continued)

"I have used this same cleaver  
Nineteen years.  
It has cut up  
A thousand oxen.  
Its edge is as keen  
As if newly sharpened.

"There are spaces in the joints;  
The blade is thin and keen;  
When this thinness  
Finds that space  
There is all the room you need!  
It goes like a breeze!  
Hence I have this cleaver nineteen years  
As if newly sharpened!

"True, there are sometimes  
Tough joints. I feel them coming,  
I slow down, I watch closely,  
Hold back, barely move the blade,  
And whump! the part falls away  
Landing like a clod of earth.

"Then I withdraw the blade,  
I stand still  
And let the joint, the work  
Sink in.  
I clean the blade  
And put it away."

Prince Wan Hui said,  
"This is it! My cook has shown me  
How I ought to live  
My own life."

#### IV THREE FRIENDS

There were three friends  
Discussing about life  
One said:  
"Can men live together  
And know nothing of it?  
Work together  
And produce nothing?  
Can they fly around in space  
And forget to exist  
World without end?"  
The three friends look at each other  
And burst out laughing.  
They had not explanation.  
Thus they were better friends than before.

Then one friend died.  
Confucius  
Sent a disciple to help the other two  
Chant at his obsequies (funeral)

The disciple found that one friend  
Had composed a song.  
While the other played a lute,  
They sang:

"Hey, Sung Hu!  
Where'd you go?  
Hey, Sung Hu!  
Where'd you go?  
You have gone  
Where you really were.  
And we are here---  
Damn--it! We are here!"

Then the disciple of Confucius burst in on them and  
Exclaimed: "May I inquire where you found this in the  
Rubrics for obsequies,  
This frivolous carolling in the presence of the departed?"

The two friends looked at each other and laughed,  
"Poor fellow," they said, "he doesn't know the new liturgy!"

## V. THE FIGHTING COCK

Chi Hsing Tzu was a trainer of fighting cocks  
For King Hsuan.  
He was training a fine bird.  
The king kept asking if the bird were  
Ready for combat.  
"Not yet", said the trainer.  
"He is full of fire.  
He is ready to pick a fight  
With every other bird. He is vain and confident  
Of his own strength."

After ten days, he answered again  
"Not yet. He flares up  
When he hears another bird crow."

After ten more days:  
"Not yet. He still gets  
That angry look  
And ruffles his feathers."

Again ten days  
The trainer said, "Now he is nearly ready.  
When another bird crows, his eye  
Does not even flicker  
He stand immobile  
Like a cock of wood.  
He is a mature fighter.  
Other birds  
Will take one look at him  
And run. "

## VI THE FASTING OF THE HEART

Yen Hui (顏回), the favorite disciple of Confucius, came to take leave of his Master.

"Where are you going?" asked Confucius.

"I am going to Wei."

"And what for?"

"I have heard that the Prince of Wei is a lusty, full-blooded fellow and is entirely self-willed. He takes no care of his people and refuses to see any fault in himself. He pays no attention to the fact that his subjects are dying right and left. Corpses lie all over the country like hay in a field. The people are desperate. But I have heard you, Master, say that one should leave the state that is well-governed and go to that which is in disorder. At the door of the physician there are plenty of sick people. I want to take this opportunity to put into practice what I have learned from you and see if I can bring about some improvement in conditions there."

"Alas!" said Confucius, "You do not realize what you are doing. You will bring disaster upon yourself. TAO has no need of your eagerness, and you will only waste your energy in your misguided efforts. Wasting your energy you will become confused and then anxious. Once an(xious), you will no longer be able to help yourself. The sages of old first sought TAO in themselves, then looked to see if there was anything in others that corresponded with TAO as they knew it. But if you do not have TAO yourself, what business have you spending your time in vain efforts to bring corrupt politicians into the right path?...However, I suppose you must have some basis for your hope of success. How do you propose to go about it?"

Yen Hui replied: "[I]ntend to present myself as a humble, disinterested man, seeking only to do what is right and nothing else, a completely simple and honest approach. Will this win his confidence?"

"Certainly not." Confucius replied. "This man is convinced that he alone is right. He may pretend outwardly to take an interest in an objective stand of justice, but do not be deceived by his expression. He is not accustomed to being opposed by anyone. His way is to reassure himself that he is right by trampling on other people. If he does this with mediocre men, he will all the more certainly do it to one who presents a threat by claiming to be a man-of-high quality. He will cling stubbornly to his own way. He may pretend to be interested in your talk about what is objectively right, but interiorly he will not hear you, and there will be no change whatever. You will get nowhere with this."

Yen Hui then said: "Very well, instead of directly opposing him, I will maintain my own standards interiorly, but outwardly, I will appear to yield. I will appeal to the authority of tradition, and to the examples of the past. He who is interiorly uncompromising is a son of heaven just as much as any ruler. I will not rely on any teaching of my own, and will consequently have no concern about whether I am approved or not. I will eventually be recognized as perfectly disinterested and sincere. They will all come to appreciate my candor, and thus I will be an instrument of peace in their midst.

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VI. THE FASTING OF THE HEART (continued)

"Meanwhile, all I have to say will be expressed in terms of ancient tradition. I will be working with the sacred tradition of the ancient sages. Though what I say may be objectively a condemnation of the Prince's conduct, it will not be I who say it, but tradition itself. Do you think I have the right approach?"

"Certainly not," said Confucius. "You have too many different plans of action. When you have not even gotten to know the Prince and observed his character! At best, you might get away with it and save your skin, but you will not change anything whatever. He might perhaps superficially conform to your words, but there will be no real change of heart."

Yen Hui then said, "Well, that is the best I have to offer. Will you, Master, tell me what you suggest?"

"You must fast!" said Confucius. "Do you know what I mean by fasting? It is not easy, but easy ways do not come from God."

"Oh," said Yen Hui, "I am used to fasting! At home we were poor. We went for months without wine or meat. That is fasting, is it not?"

"Well you can call it 'observing a fast', if you like," said Confucius, "but it is not the fasting of the heart."

"Tell me," said Yen Hui, "what is fasting of the heart?"

Confucius replied, "The goal of fasting is inner unity. This means hearing, but not with the ear; hearing, but not with the understanding; hearing with the spirit, with your whole being. - The hearing that is only in the ears is one thing. The hearing of the understanding is another. But the hearing of the spirit is not limited to any one faculty. Hence it demands the emptiness of all the faculties. And when the faculties are empty, then the whole being listens. There is then a direct grasp of what is right there before you that can never be heard with the ear or understood with the mind. Fasting of the heart empties the faculties, frees you from limitation and from preoccupation. Fasting of the heart begets unity and freedom."

"I see," said Yen Hui. "What was standing in my way was my own self-awareness. If I can begin this fasting of the heart, self-awareness will vanish. Then I will be free from limitation and preoccupation! Is that what you mean?"

"Yes," said Confucius, "that's it! If you can do this, you will be able to go among men in their world without upsetting them. You will not enter into conflict with their ideal image of themselves. If they will listen, sing them a song. If not, keep silent. Don't try to break down their door. Don't try out new medicines on them. Just be there among them, because there is nothing else for you to be one of them. Then you may have success!"

"It is easy to stand still and leave no trace, but it's hard to walk without touching the ground. If you follow human methods, you can get away with deception. In the way of TAO, no deception is possible."

THE FASTING OF THE HEART

"Look at this window: it is nothing but a hole in the wall, but because of it the whole room is full of light. So when the faculties are empty, the heart is full of light. Being full of light it becomes an influence by which others are secretly transformed."