

先師孔子行教像



孔夫子

Master Kong (500 BC)

sayings from his 'Conversations' (Lunyu 論語)

At fifteen years old, my heart was set upon learning. At thirty, I had become established. At forty, I was no longer perplexed. At fifty, I understood what heaven meant. At sixty, I simply obeyed. And at seventy, I could follow my heart's desires without crossing the line.

The only constant is change. If some years were added to my life, I would dedicate at least fifty more to studying the Change Classic (Yi Jing). Then I might finally come to be without great fault.

He who gives no regard to what is distant is sure to be inflicted with sorrows close at hand.

As for me, I set my heart upon the way and guide my will by the modest light of virtue. I work tirelessly for the enrichment of humanity and take my recreation in the arts whenever possible.

It is rare for someone to miss the mark through holding onto essentials.

Those who truly wish to learn must seek neither satisfaction in their food nor comfort in their dwelling. They must be diligent in their undertakings and careful in their speech. They must tirelessly inquire after others who follow the way and be corrected by them. It is only those who truly love to learn who actually learn.

When you know, say you know. When you don't know, say you don't know. This is the secret of knowledge. Follow this advice and you will never stop learning.

To think without learning is useless. To learn without thinking is dangerous.

I am not one who was born with any special knowledge. I am simply one who loves the past and things that have already experienced existence. I am diligent in seeking this in everything. We do not gain knowledge because we seek it. We gain knowledge because we love to learn.

Study the past as if you would there find the future.

In learning and seeking broadly and in being genuinely interested in what we find, in earnestly inquiring into and reflecting upon the things before us, here we find our humanity.

In education, there should be no separation into categories and classes.

I have spent many days without eating and nights without sleeping, so as to think and figure out, trying to understand. It was of no use. It is better to just learn.

When the Master entered the great temple for the first time, he was truly amazed and asked about everything. Noticing his almost naïve behavior, somebody commented, “Is this not the famous Master Kong, the man who is supposed to be an expert in rites and rituals? When he enters the great temple, he asks about everything as if he hasn’t heard.” The Master heard him say it and replied, “This is the ritual.”

It is mankind that is capable of broadening the way. It is not the way that is capable of broadening mankind.

When practice prevails over theory, there is the warrior. When theory prevails over practice, there is the scholar. When the scholar and the warrior, the refinement and the substance, are evenly balanced, there is the Master and the source of achievement.

There were four things the Master always spoke of: culture, right action, loyalty, and truth.

There were four things the Master never spoke of: force, luck, chaos, and spirits.

When faced with the opportunity to be humane do not give precedence even to things your teacher might have said. Perhaps you misunderstood.

I have never met a person who loved virtue as much as they loved beauty. May our virtue be beautiful indeed!

Knowing it does not compare to loving it. Loving it does not compare to delighting in it.

Everything has beauty but not everyone sees it.

Zigong asked the Master, “Poor yet free from pity and rich yet free from pride. Is this not the way to be?” Master Kong replied, “Sure, that would work. But it’s not as good as ‘poor yet delighting in the way and rich yet in love with helping others to find it.’”

Ran Qiu said, “It is not that I don’t delight in your way, Master. I do, but it’s just that my strength is insufficient to continue learning.” The Master said, “Yes, it’s true. Those whose strength is insufficient usually drop out halfway through. But now you are setting limits. Whoever said that learning had limits?”

It does not matter how slow you go as long as you do not stop.

Men are close to one another by nature. They diverge only as a result of repeated practice.

Somebody once asked Master Kong to explain the ritual of sacrificial offerings to the gods. Master said, “I do not know. If I knew the explanation it would be as if the entire heavenly plan were written right here.” He pointed to the palm of his hand.

Forget injuries but never forget kindnesses.

Wealth and honor are what people desire. But one should not accept them if it cannot be done in accordance with the way. Poverty and disgrace are what people dislike. But one should not avoid them if it cannot be done in accordance with the way. If the noble person rejects humanity, how can they be said to be noble? Those who are most worthy of praise are those who do not abandon humanity for even a moment. Even when hard-pressed, even when in great danger, they are bound to it.

Virtue is not solitary. Through its very nature, it generates community. If the practice of virtue leads one to become separated from others, then it is not virtue that one is practicing.

Ji Wenzhi was famous for his careful and considerate actions. It was said that he thought three times before acting. Master heard of this and said, "I would think twice would be enough."

Devote yourself to what is correct for humanity and respect the spirit of it while keeping a little distance. This is called wisdom. First take care of what is difficult and only then concern one's self with the search for success. This is called humanity.

The wise enjoy water and the humane enjoy mountains. The wise are active and the humane are tranquil. The wise enjoy and the humane endure.

Being able to recognize oneself in others, one is on the way to being humane. Being able to take care of what is near and grasp the metaphor of what is far, one is following the path of humanity.

The petty person is exclusive and the noble person inclusive. That is the difference.

Virtue that is understood yet not ceaselessly cultivated, learning that is accomplished yet not openly shared, righteousness that is recognized yet not completely aligned with, injustice that is noticed yet not changed. These are the roots of my sorrow.

Is humanity far away? If I want to be humane, then humanity is right here.

Standing by a stream, the Master said, "Passing on like this, it never ceases, day or night."

The wise have no doubts. The humane have no sorrows. The courageous have no fears.

Someone asked about spirits and death. Master replied, "When you have fully understood what it means to be human then you may inquire about spirits, if you still need to. When you have fully understood what it means to be alive then you may inquire about death, if you still need to."

Zigong asked about what was needed for a nation to be healthy. Master answered, "Sufficient food, sufficient military, and the confidence of the people." Zigong then asked, "If one of these three things, unavoidably, had to be dispensed with, which would it be?" Master replied, "Get rid of the military." Zigong said, "And if one of the last two, regrettably, had to be dispensed with, which should it be?" Master replied, "Get rid of the food. Since ancient times there has always been death. But without confidence, the people cannot stand."

Humanity comes from loving people. Wisdom comes from knowing people. What is righteous is recognized through wisdom and shared through humanity. Raise up the righteous and place it above the crooked, and you will lead the crooked to the righteous. This is the wisdom of humanity and the humanity of wisdom.

Master once said, "In the governing of a nation, the first thing that should be accomplished is the discrimination of names." Later, Zilu was unsure and asked what he meant, "How can this be? The

Master seems wide of the mark here. How could 'discrimination' be what is most important?" Master replied, "How uncultivated you must think I am! In regard to what one does not know, the noble person is cautiously reserved and very careful about the details. If the names of things are not clearly discriminated, then language will not be effective as we communicate our decisions. If language is not effective, then our decisions will not be understood and our efforts will not be successful. If our decisions find no expression, then our rituals and music will not flourish. If our rituals and music do not flourish, then our punishments will miss their mark. If our punishments miss the mark, then the people will not be protected and they will suffer. Therefore it is extremely important that if one attempts to honorably serve in the governing of a nation, then the names that one uses for things must be clearly discriminated and speech and action mutually aligned. In regard to language, the noble person can allow no carelessness. This is the essential point.

The Duke of Ling asked Master Kong about military strategies. The Master replied, "I have heard a few things about sacrificial vessels, but I've never learned much about the deployment of troops." The next day he made his departure.

As for governing through non-action, wasn't old Shun an example of this? What did he do? All he did was make himself reverent and face south in correct posture. That was enough.

Respect yourself and others will respect you. If one is correct and upright in oneself, things will be accomplished without even needing to make demands. If one is not upright within oneself, then even if demands are made, nothing will be accomplished.

The people are so numerous! What can be done for them? Simply enrich them and provide for their lives. Only after they have been enriched, can you begin to teach them.

To lead people into war without first teaching them the arts is to throw their lives away.

Xian asked, "To be able to relinquish all arrogance, all boasting, all resentment, and all covetousness, is this not to be considered the ultimate goal of humanity." Master replied, "This may certainly be considered difficult to do. But whether it may be considered humane or not, I do not know."

Someone said, "What do you think of the saying, 'respond to suffering with virtue'?" Master replied, "How will you then respond to virtue? I think it better to respond to suffering with righteousness and grace. Respond to virtue with virtue. If one were able to respond with virtue, then one would not be suffering."

The idea of perfection is the thief of virtue.

The humane person and civil servant can not seek more life if it means harming their humanity. On the other hand, they do often sacrifice their life in order to enrich their humanity.

Zigong asked, "Is there one word that one could lean upon throughout the course of one's life?" The Master replied, "Reciprocity. What you would not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

It is necessary to pay special attention if all the people seem to dislike a particular person. It is also necessary if all the people seem to really like a particular person.

The Master said, "I would prefer not to speak." Zigong said, "If the Master does not speak, then what would us poor students have to learn from?" Master replied, "Does heaven speak? The four seasons follow a steady course and the hundred things are silently born in their particular ways. In following the way of heaven we must listen to what heaven says, not what I say. What speaking does heaven do? Can you hear it?"

When Master Kong asked him about the way, Lao Zi answered, "Straighten your body and unify your vision. The harmony of heaven will arrive. Concentrate your intentions and understand your feelings. Spirit will come to abide. Keep your virtue yielding and the way will be there for you. Gaze straight ahead like a newborn calf without seeking a destination. Let your body be like an ancient tree and your mind like old ashes. Realize what genuine knowledge actually is and discard your twisted reasonings. Keep yourself open and unminding and you will attain the clarity you seek. When you can know this without having to know it, there you will find the way."

Who can go out without using the door? Why then does no one follow the way?

The Master said: "Do you realize Shen, that for me the way is the one thread that ties it all together." Master Zeng said: "Of course." After that the Master went outside and somebody asked: "What did he mean by that?" Master Zeng replied: "The way of our master is loyalty and mercy and that's it."

Master said: "My dear Ci, do you think I learn so many things just so I can know so many things?" Ci replied: "Yes, is this not correct?" Master: "I seek only the one thread that ties it all together."