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SECOND ESSAY

ACTING WITH RIGHT MOTIVE: WITHOUT CONTRIVING FOR SELF-ADVANTAGE

There are many philosophies which teach that 'actions speak louder than words', but in Zen Taoism it is both the thought or motive, and the action, which are considered important. This view was expressed by Lao Tzu, who in the sixth century before the Christian era, wrote the definitive work of Taoist philosophy, a book of eighty-one very short but expressive chapters, known as the 'Tao Te Ching'. It was Lao Tzu's only written work, and has been translated from the original classical Chinese into most modern languages, including over thirty English translations. In chapter thirty-seven of the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu tells us,

"To act without contrived intent
is to act without contriving;
this is the way of nature,
and so is the way of the Tao."

This is expressed in the precepts as,
"Know that right motive is essential to right action,
just as right thought is essential to right words."

Such statements as this frequently give rise to the question, "What does Zen teach is right, and what does it teach is wrong?". In this sense it must be admitted that Zen teaching is difficult for the uninitiated to follow, for it says very little about 'wrongdoing', but gives examples by means of which we might ponder for ourselves on such matters as right and wrong, and of course, other issues raised by the precepts.

These examples are frequently provided in the form of 'koan', which are riddles or paradoxes, sometimes being asked as questions, or simply told as stories by the roshi during a part of sesshin known as 'sosan' or 'sanzen',

the period in which the roshi addresses the students as a group. Alternatively the roshi might present a koan for a student during naisan or dokusan. In either case though, the most difficult type of koan are probably those stated simply as a story, usually taken from real life, and referred to as 'genjo koan'. The reason for this is that it is usually difficult for the student to work out what problem the story is supposed to contain. It could be, and often is the case that the problem or exercise being set by the roshi is learning to identify the relevant problem contained within the story.

An example of this is demonstrated in the story below, which refers to an aphorism mentioned in the previous essay, concerning 'right action and right motive' as these relate to a student when he or she meets the roshi for the first time. The aphorism is a cautionary tale, taken from 'Tao, the Gateless Gate', a small collection of Zen Taoist stories.

This particular story tells of a young man who wished to attend Zen sesshin. Having a friend who already did so, he asked could his friend mention to the roshi that he would like to attend. His friend agreed, but warned him,

'If the roshi agrees to meet you, for goodness sake be careful that you do not appear to think that you know too much. The roshi is really very kind, but he believes very much that we should not boast of what we know. He told a story once of an ancient teacher interviewing a new student for the first time. Well, it seems that the student kept boasting of what he already knew, but the teacher ignored his boasting, and asked the student if he would like a cup of tea. The student held the cup, and the old teacher began to pour some tea into it.....but the student kept on boasting. The more the student boasted, the more tea was poured, until it overflowed onto the student's lap. He shouted out for the teacher to stop, and the old man did so, but said,
"When the cup is full, behold, no room for more.
So if, this mystic wisdom, you would sup,
ensure that you come hither with an empty cup."

The young man laughed at the story, and thanked his friend for the warning, assuring him that he would remember it. When the time came for him to meet the teacher, he presented himself. Bowing deeply, he said,

"Behold master, my cup is empty."

To his surprise, the teacher shook his head sadly, and said to him,

"Oh dear. You'd best go away, and come back when you've learnt some manners."

When the young man next saw his friend, he complained at the treatment he had received, and told him exactly what had happened. His friend replied,

"That's a real pity, but you can't say that I didn't warn you."

If this was your first introduction to a koan, do not be too concerned if you do not fully understand its implications. What it is meant to illustrate is that motive, words and actions must support each other. In the koan just cited, although the student's bow (the action) was appropriate, his words implied that he thought he both knew and understood about having 'an empty cup'. However, the fact that it was the first thing he said, illustrated to the teacher that he did not understand it well enough to apply it, for it really says that a student, especially a novice, should accept that he or she can know very little, especially compared with a teacher from whom he or she wishes to learn.

To someone who knows nothing of Zen, the roshi's response to the student

in the koan might seem somewhat harsh. However the relationship between any Zen teacher and student is a special one, and what occurs in the initial interview is therefore important, especially since it provides both student and teacher with an opportunity to decide whether they feel that there is a sufficient empathy between them for the teacher/pupil relationship to be of value. This is described in a short verse from 'Tao, the Gateless Gate',

'With that same right
the student has to choose his guide,
the master also makes his choice
as to whom to teach, and whom to leave alone.
For as the student seeks a master
in whom he sees that which he seeks,
so does the master, through his experience,
seek to test the student,
and his willingness to learn."

Whilst some followers of Zen believe that it should give more instruction on what is wrong or should not be done, in general and in specific situations, others maintain that the emphasis on what is right leads naturally to 'right motive and right action', and that this in turn leads to a positive attitude towards life. In essence, 'right motive' is a motive which is directed towards harmonious interaction, whereas 'right action' is the physical manifestation or realization (making real) of that motive. There are many things like this, which Zen maintains are 'right', and these are described in the precepts by such statements as,

"Have compassion for all sentient beings,
causing them no unnecessary hurt, nor needless harm."

It should be noted that this phrase talks of 'unnecessary hurt' and 'needless harm' as though it is impossible not to cause hurt or harm. This is in fact an accurate perception of the Zen view, which is that it is very unlikely that we can go through life without causing any hurt or harm at all. For example, we may kill an animal or plant for food as a necessity of life; and many parents are hurt when their offspring leave home, even though they know logically that it is a natural occurrence. In neither case does this mean that the hurt is caused deliberately, but that it would be unrealistic to believe that it did not occur at all, just as we should accept that using a sharp instrument in order to remove a splinter might cause hurt, but is a necessity, if only as an act of compassion which we might carry out in order to prevent an infection which might otherwise occur.

True compassion, as described in Zen Taoism, seems to be somewhat different from that described in many religions; or at least as far as its motives are concerned, for in Zen we are told that even an act which might benefit another person is not really an act of true compassion if it is carried out for reasons of self-advantage. In this instance it seems that many religions teach that compassion can 'reach beyond the grave', since they advise that our reward for such acts will be found in heaven. Zen offers no such promise, and considers it wrong that we should be compassionate in order to 'store up credits' as though heaven is a great 'Open University of the cosmos'. The Zen Taoist view is that we should not be without compassion, because without compassion, we are incomplete; and if we have compassion as part of our being, then we will not need to contrive or think of 'being' compassionate. This is the same as saying that with regard to compassion, we should be without motive. In chapter five of the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu says,

"Even when he seems to act
in a manner kind or benevolent,
the sage is not acting with such intent,
for he is amoral and indifferent."

This is not to say that the sage is indifferent to human suffering or needs,

but that when he performs an act which is compassionate, he does so simply because it is his nature to do so, rather than out of any sense of morality or reward.

Zen Taoism considers that there are 'three precious attributes', namely,
compassion,
economy of effort (efficiency),
and courage.

On the benefits of compassion, Lao Tzu tells us (in chapter sixty-seven),
"Only he who is compassionate
can show true bravery,
and in defending, show great strength.
Compassion is the means by which
mankind may be guarded and saved,
for heaven arms with compassion
those whom it would not see destroyed."

Whilst it is considered by some that Zen does not provide sufficient information on what it considers 'wrong', there is nevertheless a particular way in which it does in fact give us advice or direction away from what it considers to be 'wrong', or to be more precise, away from that which it considers to be harmful to the development of the individual and to society. We are advised in the precepts to,

"Seek liberation from the negative passions
of hatred, envy, greed and rage,
and especially from delusion,
deceit and sensory desire."

In many respects this statement relates closely to the precept referring to 'needless hurt and unnecessary harm', since Zen teaches us that hurt and harm are often caused unnecessarily or needlessly as a result of these 'needless passions'. It teaches that liberation from them reduces the likelihood of our causing hurt or harm to others. Examples of hurt being caused to others as a result of hatred and rage are obvious, but envy and greed are themselves negative emotions which can drive the unwary individual to perform acts against others which he or she might later regret. However, it is not only the hurt or harm we cause others which is the concern of Zen, but also the hurt or harm which we might cause ourselves to undergo, and it is for this reason that delusion is included as a negative passion or emotion.

As was stated in the first essay, there are many misconceptions concerning Zen, and those who do not know its reality are sometimes concerned that it may be a 'cult', similar in some way to those which gain their followers by promising such rewards as 'instant enlightenment', 'sexual liberation', or 'eternal salvation'. Of course, Zen offers no such promises (in fact it makes no promises at all) and offers no rewards. What it does do though is to offer an alternative 'path' which some, and not others. On the choice of a path, 'Tao, the Gateless Gate' offers the following advice,

"Many are the true paths
which to enlightenment do lead,
and there is no enlightened one
who would deny the truth of any one of these.
But among those paths we must avoid
are those which would deny enlightenment
to those who other paths have chosen.
And also, false are they which do but seek
to gratify the body, senses, or the mind,
and those which do require
that we abstain from worldly life.

Apart from these, we have no right
by which we might deny a man his chosen path,
unless his path denies our right to choose,

or can be seen to do the chooser harm.

True paths all lead to that estate
which we may call enlightenment,
And all men have the gift to use it,
to pass beyond that concept of themselves,
which they, or others have allowed
to predetermind what they are,
and what they should remain.

Whilst illustrating well that Zen does not consider itself the only path of value, this verse does provide a warning against those paths which offer 'escape' from reality by means of 'gratification of the body, senses or the mind', or by delusion (those paths which 'do the chooser harm').

Sensory desire (literally the desire to 'feed' or gratify the senses) is considered to be a form of lust for that which we see or apprehend through any of the senses, and try to obtain with disregard for ethical considerations. This does not mean that we should cease to want or need, nor that we should ignore sensory pleasure; rather it implies that we should not allow sensory considerations to take priority over our dealing with other human beings. It is considered in Zen that such desires, if not tempered by ethical considerations or compassion, frequently lead to deceit, another negative emotion from which we should seek liberation. However, it is not only the senses which demand gratification, for there are many who live much of their lives in the quest to 'gratify the mind'; that is, through intellectualizing rather than allowing themselves to experience life. Another story from 'Tao, the Gateless Gate' illustrates quite amusingly how this 'quest for knowledge' might be misused (and how a Zen teacher might help a student through that 'barrier'). The type of discussion illustrated, on the nature of existences, and what and how we know of them, is known in western philosophy as 'epistemology' (theory of knowledge). This story indicates how Zen tends to deal with such matters in a non-intellectual manner.

"A master and his student stood beside a rock.
'I say that rock exists', the master said.
The student did reply, 'And I say it does not,
for the picture that we see of things perceived,
is only in the mind.'
The master then said, 'Right, take off you shoe
and kick that rock which isn't there.
The student laughed and made reply,
'No thanks, what of the pain which will result?'
'How can there be a pain within the toe,
from kicking nothing?' his teacher asked.
'No pain within the toe,' the student did respond,
'for, as you have taught me, the pain is in the mind.'
The master then, without ado, stamped upon
the student's toe. He lifted up his injured foot,
and danced about.
The master asked, 'And is the pain is in the head,
why do you hold your toe?'
The student turned to answer him, and, in turning,
tripped upon the rock."

Although the teacher may have hurt the student's toe, we assume that this hurt would not last long. In Zen, this would be considered a small price to pay to drive out such intellectual delusion. Unfortunately though, there are of many instances in real life where the hurt is 'within the mind'. We need to think only of the changing nature of intimate human relationships to realise how much hurt and harm is caused by the hedonistic desire for continued sensory pleasure, or continued 'ownership' of another person, or when in reality a relationship has ended. It is with regard to this aspect of life, the ability or inability to let go, that Zen offers what is perhaps

its strongest guidance, expressed in the precepts as,
"Learn to let go of that which cannot be owned,
or which is destroyed by grasping."

It is not only when a relationship has ended that we need to let go. It is believed in Zen, that even trying to demand a wanted emotion or feeling from another person when it does not exist within them at that time, can create resentment, hurt or harm, and that this can have the reverse effect to that which is desired. Many a relationship has come to an end as a result of one of the people involved trying to 'own' the other, whereas the reality of a loving relationship requires 'the freedom to love', which cannot survive if a relationship becomes a prison. The breakdown (or change for the worse)

As well as being relative to intimate human relationships, this warning is relevant also to many other situations. In a society which uses competition amongst the many in order to create greater wealth for the few, even 'winning', or continuing to win, can become a burden. There are many astute manipulators who can perceive ambition in subordinates, and who increase their burden without a thought as to the consequences. Whilst it is not denied that many survive unscathed, there are many who feel unable to recognise such manipulation, and who suffer as a result of it. Similarly, the fact that an individual may accept a burden, is no guarantee that he or she will be able to predict the outcome of accepting that burden.

One of the aspects of Zen Taoist training which many students appreciate is that it places no burden upon them, and that what they do is of their volition. To be sure, the roshi may tell them from time to time that they are not making enough effort, but only for the benefit of the student; but there is no obligation on the part of the student even to continue to take instruction. This is quite often a reason why 'outsiders' are puzzled by the commitment of many Zen students to their 'training'; it seems strange to someone who is not committed, to appreciate what can be gained in terms of personal growth, by such a commitment.

This does not mean that everyone who attends sesshin is committed to Zen, but those for whom sesshin becomes a 'burden', simply stop attending. Nothing more is expected of them, but those who have the courtesy to inform the roshi or 'jikijitsu' (director of ceremonies) that they are not going to return are never questioned on their decision, since to do so might create a burden for that person.

It is of course essential in life to learn to distinguish between 'needless burdens' on the one hand, and responsibilities and obligations, on the other, and it is perhaps for this reason, the need to distinguish, that Zen advises us in the precepts to,
"Act with necessary distinction".

What is meant by this statement is that in all areas of our lives we should distinguish when necessary. We are not taught that 'everything is the same', but that in some instances we should make distinctions, whilst in other instances we should not, and that we should learn to distinguish both when and how to make such distinction as is necessary. For example, Zen tells us that it is necessary ('right') to distinguish right and wrong action, and 'wrong' in the majority of instances to discriminate against or distinguish between one or another sex, or between people because of the difference in the colour of their skin. In fact, the ancient Zen Taoists (of whom more will be said later) would be delighted to see that the anti-apartheid movement has adopted the Taoist symbol (the 'Tai Chi') as their own.

Rules and regulations can and should provide us with a sense of 'belonging' or security, and they are meant to be used for that purpose. There are, for example, the rules of etiquette which enable us to feel at ease when

we 'dine out', the 'rules of behaviour' which we observe when visiting someone else's home, and the different modes of behaviour which we observe when visiting, say, a church or a fairground. Conversely though, the observance of such rules should not be allowed to detract from our observance of the precepts. There is a story which illustrates well 'letting go', necessary distinction and 'creating burdens'. If it were used in sesshin as a koan, the students might be asked to consider it in the light of those precepts. This is the story.

Two Buddhist monks were walking along a country road together in meditation. They belonged to a contemplative, celibate order, which means that no unnecessary talk should take place, and that the monks (and nuns) should not have physical contact with members of the opposite sex.

As the two monks approached a stream which crossed the road, they saw a beautiful young lady trying to ford the stream. She was wearing a kimono, which was obviously new and expensive, and the monks saw that she was encountering considerable difficulties, since every time she placed her foot in the shallow stream, the hem of her kimono would be threatened by its muddy waters.

As they approached the young lady, one of the monks ignored her, but the second monk picked her up in his arms and carried her across the stream, depositing her on the furthest bank. The two monks resumed their silent stroll for some three miles or so, when the first monk suddenly said to the second,

"You shouldn't have done that!"

"Done what?" asked the second monk.

"Picked up that woman" replied the first monk.

"What woman?" asked the second monk.

"That woman you picked up and carried across the stream!" said the first monk angrily.

"Oh, that woman", replied the second monk,

"I put her down three miles back."

As it relates to 'letting go', the first monk had not let go of the rule regarding people of the opposite sex, and in scolding his friend, he was creating a burden for him, and by becoming annoyed, was creating a burden for himself to carry. Furthermore, he had not acted with necessary distinction between the rules of his sect, and the precept concerning compassion.

Such stories as these are often used as koan, and in such instances are told during sosan (mentioned earlier). This is usually followed by 'mondo', which really means 'question and answer', and is a discussion period in which the students ask questions of the teacher and each other, in order to improve or confirm their understanding of the issues raised in the koan. When it appears that the students understand the key issues they will be asked to 'offer proof'. They then prepare a statement which is meant to prove their understanding and ability to apply those issues. Each student then gives a response to the roshi (sometimes in note form) and the roshi replies to the response in terms of both its content and form.

If a student were to describe the content of the above koan in terms of letting go, creating burdens, compassion, or necessary distinction, this would meet with the approval of the roshi as far as content is concerned, but in order for the form to be approved the answer would have to be stated in a 'Zen manner'. Just what distinguishes this manner from any other is difficult to define, but in essence the answer would be brief, and would be a generalized statement or an allegory or analogy based on the original story.

With further regard to competitiveness and necessary distinction, we should

learn that there may be times when it is unavoidable in the system or society in which we live, but when there is no need to compete, we should not turn the situation into a competition, for to do so is to create an unnecessary burden both for ourselves and others. The relevant precept tells us,

"Refrain from needless competitiveness,
from contriving for self advantage,
and from subjugating others."

The reason for refraining from competitiveness unless it is a necessity, lies in the last line of this precept, namely that through competitiveness, somebody is subjugated; that by 'winning' we create at least one loser. By creating a loser in order to feed our own ego, we could be causing needless hurt or unnecessary harm to another, especially if that person is not competitive by nature, and even more so if he or she is vulnerable to such pressures.

On the other hand, if our chosen working environment is competitive by its very nature (as is the case in sporting activities) we are told,

"When you are required to act,
in movement be as the dragon riding the wind."

Zen has many sayings and aphorisms of this poetic nature, which it has inherited from its early Chinese origins, (known as 'Taoism'), many Zen practitioners believing that Zen is in fact a unique development of Taoist and Buddhist philosophies. The early Taoists were particularly synergic (non-competitive) and if a Taoist (or a Zenji for that matter) were to engage in a career in the market place, he or she would not 'try to sell, no matter how'. Even in such a career as marketing, Zen teaches that we should consider our motives, thoughts and actions.

It is frequently the case in marketing a product or service that the 'salesperson' is the 'subject matter expert' in that he or she knows more about what is being offered than the prospective client. In such instances, the salesperson is in authority, and with regard to such situations we are reminded,

"When accepting authority over others,
know also that you accept responsibility
for their wellbeing."

In administrative or other leadership terms, this equates with ensuring the wellbeing of one's subordinates, and with regard to marketing, it advocates that giving a service to the buyer creates a long-term customer who might actually wish to make his or her subsequent purchases from us, and that this is of far greater value to the selling (and producing) organization than an order won against the real wishes of the client. This in turn equates with the precept,

"Be just and honourable,
taking pride in what you do,
rather than being proud of what you have accomplished."

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A person with hidden motives is likely acting selfish. We have discussed the narcissistic or selfish personality in the past in our article 5 Signs You're In A Relationship With A Narcissist. Related article: 5 Signs You're In A Relationship With A Narcissist. A manipulative person with hidden motives is only focused on themselves. Psychologists believe that "failure to complete specific essential steps in the identity-formation process results in specific forms of distrust in self and others, leaving manipulative styles in place of normal feelings and expressions of confidence, respect, and mutuality." People with hidden motives may be at risk of developing antisocial personality disorder. Motivation is essential to the operation of organizations and classroom activities. The behavior is caused by the certain causes which relate to person's needs and consequences that results from acts. Motives are expressions of a person's needs. Incentives on the other hand, are external to the person. Definitions of Motivation: According to B.F. Skinner, "Motivation in school learning involves arousing, persisting, sustaining and directing desirable behavior." According to Woodworth, "Motivation is the state of the individual which disposes him to certain behavior for seeking goal." Character #1: Small Wins Self-Motivate. #2: Self-Motivating Talk. #3: The Brain Believes What You Tell It Most. #4: Motivation Buzzkills. I am extremely critical of myself. When I don't get something right, I internally berate myself and my abilities. If I mess up playing soccer or have a bad workout day, I internally chastise my laziness and lack of willpower. I had no idea I was doing this until I began to write down my internal thoughts. How to Motivate Yourself. Motivation can give you that extra push to get something done, but it doesn't always come when you need it. If you're struggling to start or complete a task, give yourself some encouragement to keep going. A... For example, you might say, "I am going for a run right now because I want to become fitter" or "I need to do this homework so that I can get an A." Remind yourself of the dangers of procrastination. Promise yourself something like "If I get this done now, I can leave work early today" or "If I can get this out of the way, I can work on something more fun."