

明 (MING)

明者 正大光明 通達明白 即孔子所謂生而知之 並非學而知之也

MING, which is the Chinese sign for Great-Respectability, Brightness, Enlightenment and Understanding, is what Confucius meant by "The knowledge that you possessed from birth, not that which you have learned."

人自少而壯而老 皆由光明之境而入黑暗之鄉
彼其聰明才智 自以為明 實則愈明而愈暗也

As Man ages from youth to adult to elder, his Brightness also changes to darkness. Owing to acquisition of more worldliness, he overestimates his wisdom; as this happens, in fact, his MING decreases and tends towards darkness.

何也 人當初生之時 茫然懵然 不知有是非善惡 不知有光明黑暗
此乃真元之體 無色無相 無黨無偏 其不明之明 正所謂大明也

Why? In infancy, man is beyond limitation and ignorance, during which, he has no knowledge of right or wrong, good or evil. He doesn't know what is bright or dark. This is the genuine essence of a body that contains neither identity nor form, it is independent and unbiased. Its deceptive non-brightness, at this point, in fact is the greatest of MING.

及夫稍長 受濁氣之傳染 四劫之銷磨 而日近於黑暗矣
四劫者 酒 色 財 氣 之謂也
人生在世 何能免此四劫 要不外乎一正而已

As He is growing up, Man, defiled by the bad side of environment and corrupted by the 'four snares' (Liquor, Color, Money and Air), daily gets closer to the darkness! People, living in this world, in order to avoid these four snares must be righteous.

酒者

古人以為祭祀之用 應酬之品 人所不可少者也
今之君子 溺情於酒以亂其性 殊不知性稟於天 亂性即以亂天也
故好酒之人 每每貽誤大事 顛顛倒倒 悶悶沉沉 何能明心 以見性耶
是以酒之為飲 宜少而不宜多

Liquor was used by ancient people for ritual ceremonies or as a social beverage. Even now, mankind can't live without it.

Today's people who are addicted to liquor disorder the essence of their minds. However, few recognize that the nature of our minds is inherent to Heaven. Perturbing the essence

of the mind is disturbing Heaven.

Therefore, alcoholics often ruin their essential works. With their senses confused and their spirits low, how can they be enlightened and realize their essence of mind?

So, the less liquor drunk, the better.

色

為悅目之具 君子無不好之 目之所見皆為色 而人以為邪淫之樂 豈不誤乎
夫婦之道 倫常之端 豈可乖亂 必以禮防閑之 以道節制之
樂而不淫 正而不邪 君子之道得矣

Color (represented by Chinese sign SIC)¹ is a pleasure to the eyes; everybody is interested in it. Everything that can be seen has a color; mankind tends to treat SIC as a joy of lust, which is misleading.

The way of life of husband and wife, which is one of the deepest human relationships and shouldn't be violated, must be defended by observing proprieties and be moderated by the TAO.

Joyful but not lustful, being righteous but not adulterous, thus the TAO of a well-behaved person is attained.

Note¹: To the Chinese way of thinking, all the world's existing phenomena are colors, rather than things which have color. Color represented by Chinese sign SIC is also commonly used to mean 'sex'.

財

為養命之原 能濟人亦能誤人 能利人亦能害人
蓋財本流通之物 祖父聚而不散 其子孫必遊手好閑
消耗於花街酒肆及一切不可思議之事 此有財反不如無財之明證也
其利人者 在於施濟貧寒 廣行公益 而可成自己之德 立自己之功
以功德遺子孫 與以錢財遺子孫 相去有千萬倍也
總之 財以養命 人所不可少 但在勿貪多 勿損人 安其本分 合乎公義而已

Money is a source of nourishment of life. Money not only can assist people; it can mislead people. It benefits people and ruins people.

Hence, money should be a circulating material. If grandparents or parents had saved all their lives for their progeny, their progeny might become idlers, doing no decent work. They might even become dissipated, spending the money on frivolous entertainment. People are better off without excessive amounts of money.

On the other hand, money can be given to the poor, or generously donated to help charity. These acts can become a good quality in our morals and reflect credit on our lives as a whole.

Passing on these good deeds of life is preferable to leaving bequest of money to your progeny.

In conclusion, money can support life. We can't live without it. But we cannot be greedy

and must not hurt others to get it. We must behave ourselves and obtain money impartially and righteously.

氣

乃一本源流 亦人所不可少

然氣有清濁 清者為正氣 上與太虛相通 濁者為邪氣 下與陰霾相通

凡人一切暴氣 皆是無名妄火 火發則燃 於精神大有妨礙

故孟子養其浩然之氣 至大至剛

Air is the source of all living things; Mankind also can't live without it.

However, air can be either pure or filthy. Pure air is a righteous air which channels upward to the great void; filthy air is a vicious air which channels downward to the hazy nether world.

All our tempers (in Chinese, 'temper' is an inner body fiery air) are nameless metaphorical fires. When such fires are burning, it affects our spirit adversely.

Therefore, Mencius¹ said, "Nurture the imperishable noble air which is vast and adamantine."

Note¹: Mencius was a follower of Confucius and a prominent figure for such philosophy.

上列四端 皆係教人由黑暗以入光明

光明者 清淨之體 透徹貫通 自然明白 為聖為賢 為仙為佛 亦不過如是焉

The above four descriptions of the 'Four Snares' attempt to teach people to go from darkness to MING. MING is a purified state which is crystallized and naturally comprehensive. Being a Saint, Sage, Deity or Buddha is nothing but having this MING.

余見世人 皆以 酒 色 財 氣 為重 好惡亂其中 利害奪其外 不能見微而知鉅 良可惜也

I looked at today's people. They all indulge the 'Four Snares,' so that inside their minds, they are confused with goodness or badness; on the outside, they are preoccupied by the sense of their personal gain or risk. It is so pitiful that they can't realize their problem after all.

又有修煉之士 辭父母 拋妻子 以圖一己之超昇 是乃不仁不孝 豈可成仙成佛乎

余稽古書所載 並無不遵廿字 而可成仙佛聖賢者

以余之見 佛祖亦有父母妻子 聖賢亦同 未聞有拋棄之者

古人云 大孝格天

天非有物 即我是也 我何為天 即心是也 人能無背於心 即無背於天矣

There are some who, in practicing TAO, have deserted their parents or abandoned their wives in order to seek enlightenment. Since these acts show neither benevolence nor filial

piety, these seekers could never become a Deity or Buddha.

I did research and couldn't find any ancient books that claim that someone who didn't observe the Twenty Characters Doctrine could become a Deity, Buddha, Saint or Sage. As far as I know, Buddha also had parents and wives, as did Saints and Sages, but they never abandoned them.

There is an old saying, "Heaven can be touched by one who has immense filial piety."

Heaven, which doesn't really have a tangible substance to feel, is us. How can we be like the Heaven? It is because our hearts, the source of the essence of our minds, are comparable to Heaven. When mankind doesn't betray its heart, it is the same as not betraying Heaven.

道書有云 天為大天 人為小天

天有三百六十五度數 人有三百六十五骨節 天有四時八節 人有四體八端

故人身血脈週流 即是週天一轉也 天有週天 人身亦有週天

The Book of Tao said, "Sky is the big heaven; mankind is the small heaven."

This is because the sky has a 365-day cycle and mankind also has 365 acupuncture points. The sky has four seasons and eight solar terms¹; mankind has 'four limbs' and 'eight body parts'².

The cycle of a man's blood circulation is also like a cycle of a day. As the sky has a daily cycle, so does mankind's body.

Note¹: 1)立春/Beginning of Spring, 2)春分/Spring Equinox,
3)立夏/Beginning of Summer, 4)夏至/Summer Solstice,
5)立秋/Beginning of Autumn, 6)秋分/Autumnal Equinox,
7)立冬/Beginning of Winter, 8)冬至/Winter Solstice.

Note²: 1)首/Head, 2)腹/Abdomen, 3)足/Legs, 4)股/Hips, 5)耳/Ears,
6)目/Eyes, 7)手/Hands, 8)口/Mouth.

@ This paragraph's analogy is quite arbitrary, but by this the author tries to emphasize that "Mankind is comparable to heaven."

天有日月 人身亦有日月 天能明而人獨不能明者 因物慾蔽之也

風雲蔽天 而天不明 物慾蔽心 而心不明

The sky has a sun and a moon; mankind also has a sun (right eye) and a moon (left eye). The sky can be brightened but mankind can't. This is because mankind's is being obscured by wanton thoughts.

Obscured by clouds, the sky would be dimmed; obscured by wanton thoughts, the essence of our minds would not be MING.

今人欲去物慾 以求其明 則在削去 酒 色 財 氣 四字而已矣 豈有他道哉

If today's people want to get rid of their wanton thoughts in order to reveal their MING, there is no other way but forbid ourselves Liquor, Color, Money and Air.

