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A Brief Discussing on the Importance of Creating Happiness and Harmony with the concept of ‘Kindness’ in Lao Tzu

Abstract

Lao Tzu said, ‘I have three precious things which I prize and hold fast.’¹ The first one is ‘kindness’. Treating others with kindness will be very natural if one is aware of that ‘Heaven and Earth came from the same root as I, and all beings and I are one life entity.’² In this case, people will treat others kindly, no matter what different races, countries and cultures are, which can promote global harmony and happiness. If someone cannot realise this fact, he might base self-interests on others’ sufferings, which will create conflicts and bring dangers for himself finally as well.

Keywords: Kindness, Harmony, Opposition, Afflictions, Unity

Preface

Focusing on self-interest always lead to opposition between people, which causes conflicts in family, society and even the whole world throughout history and many people suffer from it.

Gregg Braden, a best-selling author of The New York Times, shared his findings from the research for more than twenty years in *The Divine Matrix* that everything in our world is connected and which is proved by many groundbreaking experiments of quantum mechanics. According to this, it will be extremely benighted to hurt others for seeking self-interests, since it is just like left foot contend with right foot and left hand fight against right hand.

¹ Lao-tzu 老子, *Tao Te Jing* 《道德經》, trans. by James Legge, (Zheng Zhou: Zhongzhou Ancient Books Press 中州古籍出版社, 2016), p.99.

² Chang Yu-hern 張有恆, *The Interpretation of Tao Te Ching and Chuang Tzu* 《老莊白話解釋》 [in Chinese] (Tai Nan: Pure Land Society, 2017), p.259.

With various examples both positive and negative throughout history and the world, this essay aims at discussing the significance of ‘kindness’ which could defuse conflicts and bring harmony and happiness to the world. Besides, it also proposes how to cultivate a sense of kindness beginning with family.

Being Kind, Living in Common Harmony

In *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, the Chinese character ‘慈’ is interpreted as ‘love’.³ Zeng Yun explains it as ‘gentility, kindness and benevolence’.⁴ Therefore, benevolence, gentility and kindness are the original meanings of ‘慈’. Lao Tse said, ‘The highest excellence is like water.’⁵ Water is soft so that it can always coexist with other things. Similarly, a man with a kind and soft heart can definitely get along well with others. Even kindness can change enemies into friends.

In Chinese history, Song Ren Zong, the emperor of Song Dynasty, is one of the rare emperors who were given a posthumous title of ‘仁 (meaning kindness and benevolence)’. According to historical record, one day when Song Ren Zong was taking a stroll, he got thirsty, but he looked backwards many times and found that the kettle was not taken with him. He knew the careless servant would be punished if he mentioned this, and thus he bore the thirst and refrained from asking for water until he returned to the palace, after which he was very thirsty and asked his concubines for water.⁶ Once, when he was at the reception for the crown prince of Liao Kingdom, he said to him, ‘We are as family. We should always strive for the unity of both the countries and the well-being of our people.’⁷ There is no discrimination in his kindness. Therefore, all people, irrespective of their ages, status and nationalities, loved and respected him deeply.

³ Xu Shen 許慎 and Tang Kejing 湯可敬, *Annotated Shuowen Jiezi* 《說文解字今釋》 [in Chinese] (Hunan: Yuelu Publishing House 岳麓書社出版, 1997), p. 1445.

⁴ *Kangxi Dictionary* 《康熙字典》, <http://tool.httpcn.com/Html/KangXi/25/PWILRNAZILTBCQILXV.shtml> [accessed 15 January 2018].

⁵ Lao-tzu 老子, *Tao Te Jing* 《道德經》, trans. by James Legge, (Zheng Zhou: Zhongzhou Ancient Books Press 中州古籍出版社, 2016), p.13.

⁶ Ding Chuanjing 丁傳靖, *Compilation of Anecdote of Song Dynasty* Vol. I 《宋人佚事彙編》卷一 [in Chinese] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局, 1981), p. 25.

⁷ *Shao Si Wen Jian Qian Lu* Vol. II 《邵氏聞見前錄》卷二, <http://www.guoxue123.com/biji/song/sswjql/003.htm> [accessed 15 January 2018].

His death aroused great grief throughout the kingdom. There were even many beggars and children expressing their feelings by burning paper money that ‘the sky and sunlight were covered by smoke and dust’.⁸ The people in Liao Kingdom also ‘cried together regardless of how far they were’.⁹ Dao Zong, the emperor of Liao, also cried and was in great lamentation, mourning for Song Ren Zong as his ancestors.¹⁰ The kindness of Song Ren Zong contributed to peace for nearly half a century and the economy, culture, technology of his nation also developed well under the social harmony.

Another person — Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who is also well-known for kindness and contributed greatly to global peace, devoted herself to the service for those poor and miserable. During Kosovo War in Yugoslavia, under the circumstance where both sides of military power refused to stop fire, in order to rescue the children and women in the battle, Mother Teresa entered the war zone herself. After hearing this, both sides stopped fire and waited until she had taken all the children and women out. The secretary of the United Nations 安南 said, he was unable to do this, but Mother Teresa had done it with kindness and love.¹¹

After Mother passed away, people from different realms and religions came to her memorial service, with more than 1,000,000 people coming within seven days. Nearly all countries around the world sent telegrams of condolence, expressing their respect and grief for her.

Although there are 1000 years between their existence, Song Ren Zong and Mother Teresa have illuminated the same principle — ‘He who loves others is constantly loved by them. He who respects others is constantly respected by them.’¹² It is just as what is said by Master Han Shan, ‘If we treat others with kind attitude, we will find that all beings are one entity and there is no

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Shao Bo 邵博, *Shao Shi Wen Jian Hou Lu* Vol. I 《邵氏聞見後錄》卷第一[in Chinese](Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局, 1983), p. 5.

¹⁰ *Shao Si Wen Jian Qian Lu* Vol. II 《邵氏聞見前錄》卷二, <http://www.guoxue123.com/biji/song/sswjql/003.htm>[accessed 15 January 2018].

¹¹ *The Angel of Calcutta—Mother Teresa* 《加爾各答的天使——特蕾莎修女》, <http://www.doc88.com/p-1894778006119.html>[accessed 16 January 2018].

¹² Mencius 孟子, *The Words of Mencius* 《孟子》, trans. by James Legge, (Zheng Zhou: Zhongzhou Ancient Books Press 中州古籍出版社, 2016), p. 299.

separation between the so-called you and me.’¹³ For a person who is kind and benevolent, there is no discrimination and antagonism within him and therefore there is no enemy. He can live with everyone harmoniously and enjoy peace and happiness of life.

The Violation of kindness Always Cause Afflictions

When a person does not realize the integrity of him and the others, he will be antagonistic to the others and lose the kindness. And then the conflicts and afflictions will come subsequently.

In the end of East Han dynasty, a minister holding the political power, Dongzhuo, dismissed and decided the emperors by using his power without restriction and killed the empress dowager He with poison. Because he moved the site of the capital arbitrarily, millions of people were obliged to migrate and the roads were covered with a great number of people dying from starvation, robbery and being trampled. In addition, he executed the affluent people by fabricating the evidences of their crimes and confiscated their property. One day, he let his troops make a wholesale slaughter of gathering men and then cut and burned their heads, plundering and looting women and their belongings. It is impossible to make more than the wildest guess at how many innocent people he killed. Due to his cruel governing, the people of all parts of the country rose in revolt. Eventually, a minister, Wangyun, persuaded one of Dongzhuo’s advanced generals, Lvbu, to kill Dongzhuo and his family. At that time, ‘citizens in Changan said ‘congratulations’ to each other’.¹⁴ A death of a person made people such happy, which was caused by losing kindness and being antagonistic towards other people. In this case, how can he live in safe and happy state?

Prior to his being killed, he built the private city, Wubao. The city had a wall with height and thickness of 16 meters, which was equivalent to the standard of Changan city. Additionally, he stored up food for 30 years, about 1,5000 kilograms of golds, around 4,5000 kilograms of silvers and countless treasure. He said, ‘if I managed to defeat all of my opponents, the country would belong to me; if I had a failure, although I could not rule the country, I could live in my private

¹³ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Commentaries on ‘Tao Te Ching’* 《道德經解》 (Shanghai: Huadong Normal University Press 華東師範大學出版社, 2009), p. 130.

¹⁴ Chen Shou 陳壽, *History of the Three Kingdom* 《三國志》 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局, 1959), p. 179.

city for my remaining years.’¹⁵ He did not know that people would take their revenge on him for he had abused and killed them, that no matter how thick the city wall was, the wall could not resist the accumulated anger of people and that he would not be able to enjoy the property he plundered by killing other people. ‘If you treat other people with kindness, you will be treated in the same way. If you harm other people, you will be harmed.’ This is a simple principle. However, because of his selfishness, greed and cruelty, he could not realize it.

History has showed us over and over again that there is no winner in conflicts and the people who are involved in conflicts are victims. Japanese invaded China and made one of the three tragedies, Nanking Massacre, during the time of the Second World War. There were about three hundred thousand people killed in the massacre. Li Shuqin, a citizen in Nanking, had had nine family members living with her prior to the aggression of Japan, and seven of them were killed within a short time. However, as Fujita Shigeru said, who was a general of Japanese troops, ‘the invasion not only made me commit appalling crimes against the people of China, but also brought the people of Japan unprecedented disasters.’¹⁶ One day, while he was watching a movie related to anti-war, the movie reminded him of his elder sister and nephew who had died from the atomic bomb and he cried miserably. He said, ‘my sister and nephew, without doubt, were killed by me.’¹⁷

Whether Dongzhuo in East Han dynasty or the militarists in modern times, they valued their lives and loved their families, but they ignored the simple fact that similarly other people valued their lives and loved their families and treated other people violently and cruelly. Eventually, they had to pay miserably for their faulty thoughts and crazy conducts——losing their lives or harming their families.

¹⁵ Fan Ye 范曄, *History of the Later Han Dynasty* 《後漢書》 [in Chinese](Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局, 1965), p.2329.

¹⁶ The Confessions of Japanese War Criminal Fujita Shigeru 日本戰犯藤田茂的自供狀, <http://www.shz100.com/article-1-6273-1.html> [accessed 17 January 2018].

¹⁷ The Trauma of Historical Memories——An Essay About Visiting Liang Dan City in Zitong County, Sichuan Province 历史的创伤——四川梓潼‘两弹城’旧址观感 創傷的記憶, <https://www.sanwen.net/subject/3913055/> [accessed 28 January 2018].

As Fascist Axis Power, Nazi Germany and Japan considered their nations are the most excellent ones in the world and regarded other nations, like the Chinese nation and Jewish nation, as the inferior ones. This kind of racial antagonism derives from wrong concept, which made the two nations to become hard-hearted and even had no hesitation to slaughter people of other nations cruelly. Although they felt passionate about their nations, they were totally wrong in either concepts or actions. To revitalize their nations in this way is just like those unwise parents who spoil their children in ridiculous ways. Their original attention is to seek interests for their children, but finally they ruined their children's future and cause huge sufferings to them.

Irrespective of individuals or nations, if they separate themselves from others, they will compete with others and even fight against others, which just makes enemies and puts them in dangerous situations. Undoubtedly, there is no happiness in this case.

Cultivating Gentleness, Starting from Family

The separation between the so-called 'you' and 'me' always leads to conflict and even cruel war. Hence, it is the key point to turn conflict into peace and to change the sense of separation into consideration for others and into kindness.

Nowadays, what is the appropriate way by which people can cultivate the character of gentleness?

Firstly, people should establish a correct outlook on life and understand that in fact there is no separation between the so-called 'you' and 'me' and all beings are one entity. When a drop of water integrates itself into the vast sea, it will no longer dry. Likewise, when a person integrates himself into all beings, he will find there is broader life space. When we set up the concept that all beings are a unity, the sense of gentleness will arise in our heart naturally and we will love other people and even all things as we love ourselves.

Secondly, it is also significant that we should practice to give up egocentricity. We need to start from small things and people who are intimate with us to cultivate the sense of gentleness, which can help us experience the happiness from integrating ourselves into others. Because we firstly faced our parents, brothers and sisters when we were born, *Guidelines for Being a Good*

Person, a Chinese ancient classical text says that the perfection of personality starts from being dutiful to our parents and respectful and loving to our siblings.

If people could treat their parents with filial piety in family as what is said, ‘If whatever pleases my parents is fair and reasonable, I will try my best to attain it for them; if something displeases my parents, if within reason I will cautiously keep it away from them’,¹⁸ they could also treat others with gentleness and kindness in society just as what is said, ‘to love what the people love and to hate what the people hate’.¹⁹ If people could treat their siblings with respect and love in family as what is said, ‘If I am the older sibling, I will befriend the younger ones; if I am the younger sibling, I will respect and love the older ones’,²⁰ they could also treat their classmates, friends, and colleagues with gentleness and kindness in society, and understand what is said in *The Analects of Confucius* that people from all around the world are our brothers.²¹

If people hold the attitude of gentleness and softness in their family and love their parents and siblings as they love themselves, families will be happy and harmonious. If they treat others with the same attitude, the whole society will be happy and harmonious as well. In this case, people regard others as a part of themselves. They will certainly have no reasons to hurt others’ families and nations. Based on this condition, all of conflicts, wars and miseries will vanish invisibly.

Conclusion

It is a common situation in history that people who are gentle and kind always have a happy life and people who are indifferent and cruel always have a miserable life. Whether we will leave happy memories or painful lessons to future generations depends on whether we choose gentleness or antagonism. It is obviously proved that the power of gentleness and kindness is not confined to time and space, which encourages us to create history in a virtuous circle

¹⁸ ‘Guidelines for Being A Good Person’ 《弟子規》，trans.by Pure Land Learning College Assoc.Inc. p12.

¹⁹ Zisi & Zengzi 子思、曾子, *The Doctrine of The Mean · The Great Learning* 《中庸·大學》，trans. by James Legge, with modification as appropriate, (Zheng Zhou: Zhongzhou Ancient Books Press 中州古籍出版社, 2016) , p.109.

²⁰ ‘Guidelines for Being A Good Person’ 《弟子規》，trans.by Pure Land Learning College Assoc.Inc. p15.

²¹ Jiang Peichang 蔣沛昌, *The Modern Interpretation of The Analects* 《論語今釋》 [in Chinese] (Hunan: Yuelu Publishing House 岳麓書社出版, 1999) , p.289.

continuously. And , it is profound that Lao-tzu regarded kindness as the first among ‘the three precious things’.

President Xi Jinping once proposed that every country should join hands with each other to pursue common development and prosperity and be responsible for global issues cooperatively. His profound insight is based on the believe that the whole world is a community of shared future.²² The word ‘common’ shows the core spirit of ‘kindness’ that all beings are one entity and therefore, we should love each other. Based on this believe, President Xi not only loves people in China but also people all around the world. Meanwhile, He not only wants to realize the Chinese dream, but welcomes countries all around the world to board the train of China’s development as well.²³ Therefore, ‘kindness’ is the key point in promoting happiness and harmony in families and countries as well as the whole world.

²² China’s Diplomatic Work with Chinese Characteristics in The New Era 新時代中國特色大國外交之路, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2017/11-17/8378973.shtml>[accessed 19 January 2018].

²³ Delicious Soup Is Made by Combining Different Ingredients 和羹之美 在於合異, http://news.ifeng.com/a/20170227/50735871_0.shtml[accessed 19 January 2018].

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