



MUSINGS OF A CHINESE MYSTIC

LIONEL GILES

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**MUSINGS OF A CHINESE
MYSTIC**

**SELECTIONS FROM THE
PHILOSOPHY OF CHUANG TZŪ.**

**WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
LIONEL GILES**

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Musings of a Chinese Mystic By Lionel Giles.

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IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

When Lao Tzŭ died, Ch'in Shih went to mourn. He uttered three yells and departed.

A disciple asked him, saying: "Were you not our Master's friend?"

"I was," replied Ch'in Shih.

"And if so, do you consider that a sufficient expression of grief at his loss?" added the disciple.

"I do," said Ch'in Shih. "I had believed him to be the man of all men, but now I know that he was not. When I went in to mourn, I found old persons weeping as if for their children, young ones wailing as if for their mothers. And for him to have gained the attachment of those people in this way, he too must have uttered words which should not have been spoken, and dropped tears which should not have been shed, thus violating eternal principles, increasing the sum of human emotion, and forgetting the source from which his own life was received. The ancients called such emotions the trammels of mortality. The Master came, because it was his time to be born; he went, because it was his time to die. For those who accept the phenomenon of birth and death in this sense, lamentation and sorrow have no place. The ancients spoke of death as of God cutting down a man suspended in the air. The fuel is consumed, but the fire may be transmitted, and we know not that it comes to an end.

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To have attained to the human form must be always a source of joy. And then, to undergo countless transitions, with only the infinite to look forward to,—what incomparable bliss is that! Therefore it is that the truly wise rejoice in that which can never be lost, but endures always.

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A son must go whithersoever his parents bid him. Nature is no other than a man's parents. If she bid me die quickly, and I demur, then I am an unfilial son. She can do me no wrong. Tao gives me this form, this toil

in manhood, this repose in old age, this rest in death. And surely that which is such a kind arbiter of my life is the best arbiter of my death.

Suppose that the boiling metal in a smelting-pot were to bubble up and say: "Make of me an Excalibur"; I think the caster would reject that metal as uncanny. And if a sinner like myself were to say to God: "Make of me a man, make of me a man"; I think he too would reject me as uncanny. The universe is the smelting-pot, and God is the caster. I shall go whithersoever I am sent, to wake unconscious of the past, as a man wakes from a dreamless sleep.

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Chuang Tzŭ one day saw an empty skull, bleached, but still preserving its shape. Striking it with his riding-whip, he said: "Wert thou once some ambitious citizen whose inordinate yearnings brought him to this pass?—some statesman who plunged his country into ruin and perished in the fray?—some wretch who left behind him a legacy of shame?—some beggar who died in the pangs of hunger and cold? Or didst thou reach this state by the natural course of old age?"

When he had finished speaking, he took the skull and, placing it under his head as a pillow, went to sleep. In the night he dreamt that the skull appeared to him and said: "You speak well, sir; but all you say has reference to the life of mortals, and to mortal troubles. In death there are none of these. Would you like to hear about death?"

Chuang Tzŭ having replied in the affirmative, the skull began: "In death there is no sovereign above, and no subject below. The workings of the four seasons are unknown. Our existences are bounded only by eternity. The happiness of a king among men cannot exceed that which we enjoy."

Chuang Tzŭ, however, was not convinced, and said:

"Were I to prevail upon God to allow your body to be born again, and your bones and flesh to be renewed, so that you could return to your parents, to your wife, and to the friends of your youth,—would you be willing?"

At this the skull opened its eyes wide and knitted its brows and said:
"How should I cast aside happiness greater than that of a king, and
mingle once again in the toils and troubles of mortality?"

THE SAGE, OR PERFECT MAN

The perfect man ignores self; the divine man ignores action; the true Sage ignores reputation.

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The perfect man is a spiritual being. Were the ocean itself scorched up, he would not feel hot. Were the Milky Way frozen hard, he would not feel cold. Were the mountains to be riven with thunder, and the great deep to be thrown up by storm, he would not tremble.

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How does the Sage seat himself by the sun and moon, and hold the universe in his grasp? He blends everything into one harmonious whole, rejecting the confusion of this and that. Rank and precedence, which the vulgar prize, the Sage stolidly ignores. The revolutions of ten thousand years leave his unity unscathed. The universe itself may pass away, but he will flourish still.

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With the truly wise, wisdom is a curse, sincerity like glue, virtue only a means to acquire, and skill nothing more than a commercial capacity. For the truly wise make no plans, and therefore require no wisdom. They do not separate, and therefore require no glue. They want nothing, and therefore need no virtue. They sell nothing, and therefore are not in want of a commercial capacity. These four qualifications are bestowed upon them by God and serve as heavenly food to them. And those who thus feed upon the divine have little need for the human. They wear the forms of men, without human passions. Because they wear the forms of men, they associate with men. Because they have not human passions, positives and negatives find in them no place. Infinitesimal, indeed, is that which makes them man; infinitely great is that which makes them divine!

Hui Tzŭ said to Chuang Tzŭ: "Are there, then, men who have no passions?"

Chuang Tzŭ replied: "Certainly."

"But if a man has no passions," argued Hui Tzŭ, "what is it that makes him a man?"

"Tao," replied Chuang Tzŭ, "gives him his expression, and God gives him his form. How should he not be a man?"

"If, then, he is a man," said Hui Tzŭ, "how can he be without passions?"

"What you mean by passions," answered Chuang Tzŭ, "is not what I mean. By a man without passions I mean one who does not permit good and evil to disturb his internal economy, but rather falls in with whatever happens, as a matter of course, and does not add to the sum of his mortality."

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He who knows what God is, and who knows what Man is, has attained. Knowing what God is, he knows that he himself proceeded therefrom. Knowing what Man is, he rests in the knowledge of the known, waiting for the knowledge of the unknown. Working out one's allotted span, and not perishing in mid career,—this is the fulness of knowledge.

Herein, however, there is a flaw. Knowledge is dependent upon fulfilment. And as this fulfilment is uncertain, how can it be known that my divine is not really human, my human really divine? We must have *pure men*, and then only can we have *pure knowledge*.

But what is a pure man?—The pure men of old acted without calculation, not seeking to secure results. They laid no plans. Therefore, failing, they had no cause for regret; succeeding, no cause for congratulation. And thus they could scale heights without fear; enter water without becoming wet; fire, without feeling hot. So far had their wisdom advanced towards Tao.

The pure men of old slept without dreams, and waked without anxiety. They ate without discrimination, breathing deep breaths. For pure men draw breath from their uttermost depths; the vulgar only from their throats. Out of the crooked, words are retched up like vomit. If men's passions are deep, their divinity is shallow.

The pure men of old did not know what it was to love life nor to hate death. They did not rejoice in birth, nor strive to put off dissolution. Quickly come and quickly go;—no more. They did not forget whence it was they had sprung, neither did they seek to hasten their return thither. Cheerfully they played their allotted parts, waiting patiently for the end. This is what is called not to lead the heart astray from Tao, nor to let the human seek to supplement the divine. And this is what is meant by a pure man.

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The pure men of old did their duty to their neighbours, but did not associate with them. They behaved as though wanting in themselves, but without flattering others. Naturally rectangular, they were not uncompromisingly hard. They manifested their independence without going to extremes. They appeared to smile as if pleased, when the expression was only a natural response. Their outward semblance derived its fascination from the store of goodness within. They seemed to be of the world around them, while proudly treading beyond its limits. They seemed to desire silence, while in truth they had dispensed with language. They saw in penal laws a trunk¹; in social ceremonies, wings²; in wisdom, a useful accessory; in morality, a guide. For them penal laws meant a merciful administration; social ceremonies, a passport through the world; wisdom, an excuse for doing what they could not help; and morality, walking like others upon the path. And thus all men praised them for the worthy lives they led.

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The repose of the Sage is not what the world calls repose. His repose is the result of his mental attitude. All creation could not disturb his equilibrium: hence his repose. When water is still, it is like a mirror, reflecting the beard and the eyebrows. It gives the accuracy of the water-level, and the philosopher makes it his model. And if water thus derives lucidity from stillness, how much more the faculties of the mind! The mind of the Sage, being in repose, becomes the mirror of the universe, the speculum of all creation.

¹ A natural basis of government.

² To aid man's progress through life.

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The truly great man, although he does not injure others, does not credit himself with charity and mercy. He seeks not gain, but does not despise his followers who do. He struggles not for wealth, but does not take credit for letting it alone. He asks help from no man, but takes no credit for his self-reliance, neither does he despise those who seek preferment through friends. He acts differently from the vulgar crowd, but takes no credit for his exceptionality; nor, because others act with the majority, does he despise them as hypocrites. The ranks and emoluments of the world are to him no cause for joy; its punishments and shame no cause for disgrace. He knows that positive and negative cannot be distinguished, that great and small cannot be defined.

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The true Sage ignores God. He ignores man. He ignores a beginning. He ignores matter. He moves in harmony with his generation and suffers not. He takes things as they come and is not overwhelmed. How are we to become like him?

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The true Sage is a passive agent. If he succeeds, he simply feels that he was provided by no effort of his own with the energy necessary to success.

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External punishments are inflicted by metal and wood. Internal punishments are inflicted by anxiety and remorse. Fools who incur external punishment are treated with metal or wood. Those who incur internal punishment are devoured by the conflict of emotions. It is only the pure and perfect man who can succeed in avoiding both.

RANDOM GLEANINGS

TAKE no heed of time, nor of right and wrong; but, passing into the realm of the Infinite, take your final rest therein.

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Our life has a limit, but knowledge is without limit.

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To serve one's prince without reference to the act, but only to the service, is the perfection of a subject's loyalty.

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In trials of skill, at first all is friendliness; but at last it is all antagonism.

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Tzŭ Ch'í of Nan-po was travelling on the Shang mountain when he saw a large tree which astonished him very much. A thousand chariot teams could have found shelter under its shade.

"What tree is this?" cried Tzŭ Ch'í. "Surely it must have unusually fine timber." Then, looking up, he saw that its branches were too crooked for rafters; while, as to the trunk, he saw that its irregular grain made it valueless for coffins. He tasted a leaf, but it took the skin off his lips; and its odour was so strong that it would make a man as it were drunk for three days together.

"Ah!" said Tzŭ Ch'í. "This tree is good for nothing, and that is how it has attained this size. A wise man might well follow its example."

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A man does not seek to see himself in running water, but in still water. For only what is itself still can instil stillness into others.

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Is Confucius a Sage, or is he not? How is it he has so many disciples? He aims at being a subtle dialectician, not knowing that such a reputation is regarded by real Sages as the fetters of a criminal.

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He who delights in man is himself not a perfect man. His affection is not true charity. Depending upon opportunity, he has not true worth. He who is not conversant with both good and evil is not a superior man. He who disregards his reputation is not what a man should be. He who is not absolutely oblivious of his own existence can never be a ruler of men.

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When the pond dries up, and the fishes are left upon dry ground, to moisten them with the breath, or to damp them with spittle, is not to be compared with leaving them, in the first instance, in their native rivers and lakes. And better than praising Yao¹ and blaming Chieh² would be leaving them both and attending to the development of Tao.

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Fishes are born in water. Man is born in Tao. If fishes get ponds to live in, they thrive. If man gets Tao to live in, he may live his life in peace.

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"May I ask," said Tzŭ Kung, "about divine men?"

"Divine men," replied Confucius, "are divine to man, but ordinary to God. Hence the saying that the meanest being in heaven would be the best on earth; and the best on earth, the meanest in heaven."

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The goodness of a wise ruler covers the whole empire, yet he himself seems to know it not. It influences all creation, yet none is conscious thereof. It appears under countless forms, bringing joy to all things. It is based upon the baseless, and travels through the realms of Nowhere.

¹ A legendary Emperor, whose reign, with that of his successor Shun, may be regarded as the Golden Age of China.

² The last sovereign of the Hsia dynasty, and a typical tyrant.

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By inaction one can become the centre of thought, the focus of responsibility, the arbiter of wisdom. Full allowance must be made for others, while remaining unmoved oneself. There must be a thorough compliance with divine principles, without any manifestation thereof. All of which may be summed up in the one word passivity. For the perfect man employs his mind as a mirror. It grasps nothing: it refuses nothing. It receives, but does not keep. And thus he can triumph over matter, without injury to himself.

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Every addition to or deviation from nature belongs not to the ultimate perfection of all. He who would attain to such perfection never loses sight of the natural conditions of his existence. With him the joined is not united, nor the separated apart, nor the long in excess, nor the short wanting. For just as a duck's legs, though short, cannot be lengthened without pain to the duck, and a crane's legs, though long, cannot be shortened without misery to the crane, so that which is long in man's moral nature cannot be cut off, nor that which is short be lengthened. All sorrow is thus avoided.

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What I mean by perfection is not what is meant by charity and duty to one's neighbour. It is found in the cultivation of Tao. And those whom I regard as cultivators of Tao are not those who cultivate charity and duty to one's neighbour. They are those who yield to the natural conditions of things. What I call perfection of hearing is not hearing others, but oneself. What I call perfection of vision is not seeing others, but oneself. For a man who sees not himself, but others, takes not possession of himself, but of others, thus taking what others should take and not what he himself should take. Instead of being himself, he in fact becomes some one else.

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Ts'ui Chü asked Lao saying: "If the empire is not to be governed, how are men's hearts to be kept in order?"

"Be careful," replied Lao "not to interfere with the natural goodness of the heart of man. Man's heart may be forced down or stirred up. In each case the issue is fatal."

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The men of this world all rejoice in others being like themselves, and object to others not being like themselves.

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If metal and stone were without Tao, they would not be capable of emitting sound. And just as they possess the property of sound, but will not emit sound unless struck, so surely is the same principle applicable to all creation.

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In the Golden Age good men were not appreciated; ability was not conspicuous. Rulers were mere beacons, while the people were free as the wild deer. They were upright without being conscious of duty to their neighbours. They loved one another without being conscious of charity. They were true without being conscious of loyalty. They were honest without being conscious of good faith. They acted freely in all things without recognising obligations to any one. Thus their deeds left no trace; their affairs were not handed down to posterity.

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A man who knows that he is a fool is not a great fool.

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Appeal to arms is the lowest form of virtue. Rewards and punishments are the lowest form of education. Ceremonies and laws are the lowest form of government. Music and fine clothes are the lowest form of happiness. Weeping and mourning are the lowest form of grief. These five should follow the movements of the mind. The ancients indeed cultivated the study of accidentals, but they did not allow it to precede that of essentials.

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"You not being a fish yourself," said Hui Tzŭ, "how can you possibly know in what consists the pleasure of fishes?"

"And you not being I," retorted Chuang Tzŭ, "how can you know that I do not know?"

"If I, not being you, cannot know what you know," urged Hui Tzŭ, "it follows that you, not being a fish, cannot know in what consists the pleasure of fishes."

"Let us go back," said Chuang Tzŭ, "to your original question. You asked me how I knew in what consists the pleasure of fishes. Your very question shows that you knew I knew.¹ I knew it from my own feelings on this bridge."

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When Chuang Tzŭ's wife died, Hui Tzŭ went to condole. He found the widower sitting on the ground, singing, with his legs spread out at a right angle, and beating time on a bowl.

"To live with your wife," exclaimed Hui Tzŭ, "and see your eldest son grow up to be a man, and then not to shed a tear over her corpse,—this would be bad enough. But to drum on a bowl, and sing; surely this is going too far."

"Not at all," replied Chuang Tzŭ. "When she died, I could not help being affected by her death. Soon, however, I remembered that she had already existed in a previous state before birth, without form, or even substance; that while in that unconditioned condition, substance was added to spirit; that this substance then assumed form; and that the next stage was birth. And now, by virtue of a further change, she is dead, passing from one phase to another like the sequence of spring, summer, autumn and winter. And while she is thus lying asleep in Eternity, for me to go about weeping and wailing would be to proclaim myself ignorant of these natural laws. Therefore I refrain."

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¹ For you asked me *how* I knew.

