

MR WEST MEETS THE SATORI.

The Chaplain is reading, *The Ambassador* (1965) by Morris L West. This novel based on the early years of US involvement in Vietnam begins with the US Ambassador to Japan preparing to post in Saigon. Having a variety of past-life “demons,” The Ambassador seeks wisdom from a Zen Master. During the Master’s *koan* he explains *satori*.¹ Zen Master tells The Ambassador:

The root of distress is a sense of alienation from the natural order of the universe. The effect of *satori* is the illumination of the mind, so that the nature of the self and the universe is finally clear and the sense of true relationship, or oneness, is restored.

This relationship between self and universe comes from Before Common Era. Taoist Lao Tzu (≈571 BCE) wrote:

Your life is not your self, it is a harmony lent to you by the universe.
Your nature is not possessed by you;
it is a natural evolution lent to you by the universe.
It is a “lending” of harmony, happiness and pleasure. ²

Zen Master says, seek the natural order in the universe. Lao Tzu says, the universe is the natural order. Chaplain says, the universe is a community and the natural order of the community is a dialectic of happy-sad. Community is full of likes and dislikes, harmony and harm. These are the opposite powers of Yin-Yang: the dialectic of negative-positive, dark-light, night-day, female-male. It can also represent the dialectic of self-others, and self-community. One half of a dialectic cannot work without the other. Together they make the whole. Happiness, success, pleasure, all result from a synergy created by both halves working together.

Understanding the community natural order of happy-sad, the self can find the happiness side of the order and avoid distress. Again, Lao Tzu:

Perfect happiness is described as success.
When the ancient spoke of happiness and success,
... they meant the state wherein one's happiness was complete. ³

But, wait! Complete needs the recognition of values which exist on both sides of the happy-sad dialectic; that is, those who are currently happy need to recognize those who are currently sad. The whole cannot operate unless both sides are recognized as having equal presence in the natural order. There is also a recognition that the self might alternate between sides as time goes by; or, it may even permanently morph from one to the other.

This is the dilemma of policy making. The goal is more “happy than sad.” However, no matter how much happy, there is always a sad factor. Sad can bring the unhappiness

which leads to Zen Master's "distress," and may lead to chaos. Again, Lao Tzu: "Your life is not your self, it is a harmony lent to you by the universe." Harmony is the lesson of the Yin-Yang - here, the universe-community. A happy community is a happy whole, lending its happiness to the entire community of all self. In order to work, the Tao has an instruction: Do nothing and everything is done. In place of forcing opposites into an action, Tao wisdom suggests active-inaction. This is not, do absolutely nothing. It means, forcing may bring a result that is opposite to the desired outcome - and even more sad. In ethics, this is known as the double-effect. Chaplain calls this active-inaction, "thinking of the consequences before acting." It is an observing of the universe around the self; analyzing it and contemplating what could go wrong if the other self is forced. Could there be harmony or could there be harm? It means anticipating an outcome and sometimes accepting it. Chaplain reads this in Zen Master's wisdom: "The root of distress is a sense of alienation from the natural order." A force against the order brings distress somewhere in the community. Can it bring chaos, as well?

The reader might take this non-forcing as accepting the status quo and all that the dominance has constructed. No. Sometimes, as in a democracy, the diminutive has the ability to successfully undermine what the dominance desires. This is often seen in the duelling within a marriage. It works in either direction. Chaplain is suggesting that being the dominance does not relinquish the obligation for understanding and dialogue with the diminutive. It also suggests that the diminutive does not purposely obstruct the order which could be created, purely for destructive reasons. Again, happiness comes from success. When both sides of the dialectic cannot find happiness, there is only sadness. No one succeeds. The wisdom of Tao applies: realize the lesson of Yin-Yang; analyse the natural order; contemplate the consequences; interpret the results of active-inaction; decide the most appropriate action; seek complete happiness. It begins with a self awareness, awareness of the other - the community - and a desire for complete happiness. This is enlightenment.

Here is where Mr West Meets The Satori. As The Ambassador deals with the events in Saigon, he begins to learn more than he understood before arriving. The chaos he thought he could quell has deeper roots and more complications than was known. At the same time, The Ambassador is learning more about himself and the choices he has to make - his own Yin-Yang. Morris West places *satori* - the enlightenment and ascension to it - right at the entrance of this novel. Again, Zen Master says:

The effect of satori is the illumination of the mind,
so that the nature of the self and the universe is finally clear
and the sense of true relationship, or oneness, is restored.

There is a moral, here. An illumination of the mind, as to what is the universe and how the self fits in it, clears the way for oneness. An enlightenment of one's own self opens the door for clearer directions in life. The Self might be surprised by the clarity.

NOTES

1. Koan is the questioning by a Zen Master which tests, teaches and aids the student in finding their own answers - similar to Socratic-method. Scholastic explanations of *satori* are: direct experience of enlightenment, as in Buddha Guatama; result of meditative practice; ascension to enlightenment. Chinese, Indian and Zen Buddhism each have varying views on *satori*.
2. Tao 4:10, taken from, Yutang, Lao Tse, The Lessons of Tao, p 95.
3. Also Tao 4:10. The Chaplain also examines Lao Tzu and, Self and Universe in the essay, Honor-Shame: Its Effect on Community Harmony and Harm, 2012.