

Wisdom

Reading about *Wisdom*

What follows is derived mainly from the traditions of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Zen and Hinduism. Not every reader would wish me to concentrate on Eastern and for the most part ancient sources. Please note firstly however that contemporary translations and modern commentaries from the Western viewpoint are now relatively common. Secondly, I can write with more authority on the texts with which I am most familiar; and that, simply, is how things came about.

As a medical student I read C. G. Jung's autobiographical, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Fontana), and Frieda Fordham's book, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology* (Penguin). Jung found support for his ideas on the collective unconscious in the East. He was friends with Richard Wilhelm who, collaborating with the foremost Chinese scholars early in the century, translated a number of texts, most notably, *I Ching*, known also as, *Book of Changes*. This was rendered into English from German by Cary F. Baines, and Jung wrote a foreword in 1949 for that edition which is today published by Arkana (originally by Princeton University Press).

Wilhelm, in his introduction, wrote, "The seasoned wisdom of thousands of years has gone into the making of *I Ching*. Its origins go back to mythical antiquity". In my view, the book repays the most earnest, studied and repeated attention. Presented in 64 sections (each based on a separate hexagram) cosmic order, social interaction and human, family relationships are portrayed as integrated and essentially changing, flowing in a natural and continuous (circular) sequence.

The six lines, unbroken (yang) and broken (yin), can be arrived at by throwing three coins six times; hence the *I Ching* may be consulted as an oracle, giving advice on conduct for the "superior man", according to the situation depicted in the hexagram. Over time and with familiarity the subtle nature of the inter-relatedness of all things will be revealed, and thus the greater wisdom of the book – its relevance and usefulness – emerges.

I discovered the *Book of Changes* myself about ten years ago, at about the same time as a friend (who was a Jungian analyst) introduced me to an American who had been living for seven years as a Buddhist monk in a Tibetan order. By now I was training in psychiatry: some questions, indeed problems, had arisen in my trying to do well at that. As a

result, some months later, I spent a little time living in a 'Centre for Buddhist Studies'. I was given a meditation technique to practice. I went to teaching sessions. Above all I spent many hours in the library there. Many things fell into place and became clear.

I was particularly drawn to the idea that when one has exhausted one's knowledge and one's ability to help someone, or when one's offers are rebuffed, it may be helpful to reverse the relationship, to approach that person in future as a teacher; even as a "sacred jewel", a gift: not someone on whom to try and bestow one's own poor stock of knowledge, but a friend and treasure in one's own search for wisdom.

Two texts outline this reversed approach known as "thought transformation": Shantideva's, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* and *Advice from a Spiritual Friend* by Geshe (teacher) Rabten and Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey. (These can be obtained from Jamyang Meditation Centre, telephone 071-359 1394.) The first was written in the 8th century AD, the second in the 1970s. Neither is especially easy. Advice is given only to read and take heed of what seems useful.

Shantideva seems particularly daunting in his exhortation to utter virtue. "Do not worry about trying too hard", the monks advised us kindly and repeatedly, "Maintain a gentle but sustained effort. You are already (in Buddhist terms) doing very well!"

Anyone put off by the complexity of these ideas might profitably turn to and enjoy, *The Dhammapada* (The Sayings of the Buddha). My preferred translation is that of Thomas Byrom (Vintage Books, New York, 1976). Eknath Easwaran's version (Arkana, London, 1987) can also be recommended. *The Dhammapada* is a collection of twenty-six poems of outstanding beauty and simplicity with titles such as 'Joy', 'Yourself', 'Anger', 'The World', 'Violence', 'Mind' and 'The Wise Man'.

The book begins with the poem, 'Choices', the opening lines of which are as follows:

*We are what we think.
All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts we make the world.*

Other worthwhile books on the historical Buddha and his teachings include: *Buddhist Scriptures*, selected and translated by Edward Conze (Penguin Classics, 1959); and *What the Buddha Taught* by Walpola Rahula (Gordon Fraser Gallery Ltd,

London, 1978). There are chapters in the former on Morality, Meditation and Wisdom. The latter is particularly helpful on The Four Noble Truths, also in conveying the Buddhist attitude of mind. Buddha taught often in parables. Many of these are to be found and explained in these texts.

Two Taoist collections or scriptures I favour are: *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tsu; and *Inner Chapters* by Chuang Tsu, who probably lived in the 6th and 4th centuries BC respectively. Both have been translated by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English in splendid editions (Vintage, New York, 1972. Also, Wildwood House, London, 1973 and 1974). Like the Byrom *Dhammapada*, these are large paperbacks, excellently illustrated with black and white photographs.

Another good and accessible translation of *Tao Te Ching* is that of Stephen Mitchell (Macmillan [hb] and Kylie Cathie [pb], London, 1989 and 1990).

"Fame or integrity: which is more important? Money or happiness: which is more valuable? Success or failure: which is more destructive?" Lao Tsu.

The seven 'Inner Chapters' evoke cosmic harmony, the rhythm of nature and the rich interplay of humanity with poetic fables, generous humour, fantastic imagery and breathtaking insight, giving life to the philosophies of the *Book of Changes* and Lao Tsu's *Taosim*. One of these fables concludes, "If a man whose body is strange can take care of himself, how much easier it is for a man with strange behaviour". Thought-provoking.

Readers who wish to take an interest in Zen, a perhaps austere or uncluttered branch of Buddhism, could do no better than to start with two short works by Eugen Herrigel, translated from German by R. F. C. Hull: *Zen in the Art of Archery* and *The Method of Zen* (Arkana, London, 1985 and 1988). From there one might try, *Zen Training (Methods and Philosophy)* by Katsuki Sekida (Weatherill, New York, 1975). "Zen", writes Herrigel, "Does not preach. It waits until people feel stifled and insecure, driven by a secret longing".

It could hardly be further from the stark simplicity of Zen to the rich complexity of Hindu mythology. Nevertheless in the *Upanishads*, translated by Juan Mascaró (Penguin Classics, 1965) and the *Bhagavad Gita* (The Song of God), we have Hindu scriptures of great antiquity whose authors appear to approach the same essentially indescribable ground or origin of wisdom. The translation of the Gita which I very much prefer is that by Christopher Isherwood and his guru, Swami Prabhavananda (Vedanta Press, California, 1944 – still available). This has a fine introduction by Aldous Huxley in which he draws parallels between the Gita and Buddhism, the *Tao Te Ching*, Platonic dialogues, the Gospels, Christian mystics and the Persian sufis. (I do not know why he omitted Marcus Aurelius.) It is worth reading for what Huxley writes on, 'The Perennial Philosophy', alone.

The *Bhagavad Gita* itself is a dialogue between God (in the form of Krishna) and Man (Arjuna). "Who cares to seek for that perfect freedom? One man, perhaps, in many thousands". "Yes, Arjuna, the mind is restless, no doubt, and hard to subdue. But it can be brought under control by constant practice, and by the exercise of dispassion."

These books are reasonably priced. Not all will be easy to find and purchase. Some may be borrowed, for example from The Buddhist Society (58 Eccleston Square, London SW1. Telephone: 071-834 5858) after becoming a member (£16 per annum; for which one also receives their quarterly journal). Many, alongside some curious and fascinating volumes on theosophy, astrology, magic, mysticism, mythology and so on, are stocked by – or can be ordered through – a shop patronised by C. G. Jung himself: Watkins Books (Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road, London WC2. Telephone: 071-836 2182).

Happy browsing! *Let Wisdom Guide*.

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The education of psychiatrists: does a nurse have a role?

DEAR SIRS

... if so, I respond to Dr Jorsh (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, June 1991, 15, 339–340).

A 'Branch Programme', which Dr Jorsh uses as his main information source, is only the latter half of a three-year course; the first being a 'Common Foundation Programme', which includes grounding in biological and social sciences. Much medical, as well as nursing, theory is deductive; i.e. it is derived