

Preface to The Ten Diagrams of Sage Learning (1568) Yi Hwang (T'oegye)

Hwang, Yi (T'oegye). 1988. *The Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*. Translated by Michael Kalton. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Yi Hwang (1501-1570), whose honorific name was T'oegye, was one of Korea's leading Neo-Confucian thinkers under the Choson dynasty. His most influential work, The Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning was composed in 1568 just prior to retiring due to illness. In just ten simple panels – which one could read and contemplate easily multiple times – Yi T'oegye distilled and provided commentary for the Neo-Confucian writings of Chinese philosopher Chu Hsi (1130-1200). Neo-Confucianism called for the balance between social order and proper government on the one hand and meditative self-cultivation as found in Buddhism on the other. The following passage is taken from the address to King Sonjo introducing the panels.

The Minister Without Portfolio, Your subject Yi Hwang, reverently bows twice and addresses Your Majesty.

The Tao is without form and Heaven does not employ speech; when the River Diagram and the Lo Writing appeared the Sage [Fu Hsi], basing himself upon them, made the trigrams [of the *Book of Changes*] and then for the first time the Tao was made manifest to the world. But the Tao is broad and vast; where can one lay hold of it? The ancient teachings are beyond count; where shall one begin?

But there are major premises involved in sage learning and absolute essentials in the method of cultivating one's mind-and-heart. The wise men of later times could not but take up the task of setting these forth in diagrams and pointing them out in treatises in order to show others the gate for entering the true Tao and the foundation for accumulating virtue.

This is even more important in the case of one who rules others. His single mind is the place where the beginnings of myriad affairs originate, the place where a hundred responsibilities come together. Manifold desires attack it in unison and all sorts of deceits try to bore their way in. If one is but once slack and heedless it will run wild, and if this continues it becomes like the collapse of a mountain or the boiling of the sea: who can control it then!

The Sage Emperors and wise Rulers of old were much concerned by this, and hence were wary and fearful, cautious and reverent. [But although they kept this attitude] day after day, they yet regarded it as insufficient; therefore they instituted the offices of tutors to instruct them and officials with the duty to remonstrate with them. Before them there was questioning, behind them assistance; to their left there were those who could remedy [their shortcomings], to their right those who could help. "When they rode in a carriage, there were the rules concerning the bodyguard, and at court there were the regulations of the officials and tutors; when at their desks there was the remonstrance of the Master of Recitation, and in their chambers there were the admonitions of their Chamber Councilors; when attending to affairs they had the guidance of the Music Master and Court Astrologer, and when at leisure there were the recitations of the Minister of Works." Even on their wash basins, rice bowls, writing desks, staffs, swords, and window lattices, wherever the eye might rest, wherever they might be, everyplace there was an inscription or admonition.

Such were the lengths to which they went in their measures to maintain proper dispositions and defend their persons [from errant tendencies]. Thus day by day their virtue was renewed and their accomplishments increased; they made not the slightest mistake and enjoyed great renown.

As for the rulers of later times, when they receive the Mandate of Heaven and occupy the throne, the extreme gravity and greatness of their responsibilities is no less than that [of the rulers of ancient times], but of the measures they take to properly regulate and control themselves, not one is as stem as were these. So they complacently consider themselves sages and arrogantly assume a haughty air as they preside over the nobles and occupy the position at the head of the multitudes; and when they thus come in the end to ruin and rebellion and are completely wiped out, what is there to cause surprise!...

There are however, points which have not been completely explained. I beg leave to expound them further.

Mencius said, "The office of the mind is thinking; if one thinks, one will apprehend [what is proper]; if one does not think, he will not apprehend it." And Chi Tzu (Kija) in setting forth the Grand Plan for King Wu said in a similar vein, "Thought means wisdom; wisdom makes one a sage." Indeed, the mind is embodied in the heart and is perfectly empty, perfectly spiritual; principle (*li*) is manifest in diagrams and writings; it is perfectly evident, perfectly true and real. If with a mind that is perfectly empty and perfectly spiritual one seeks principle that is perfectly evident and perfectly true and real, there rightly should be no failure in apprehending it. Thus as for thinking and so apprehending [what is proper], or being wise and so becoming a sage, how can there be any lack that would prevent one's actually experiencing this in our own times? Nevertheless, although the mind is empty and spiritual, if it is lacking the proper self-mastery, matters will present themselves and not be thought out. And even though principle is evident, true, and real, if one does not perceptively attend to it, though it is constantly right before one's eyes he will not see it. This applies likewise to these diagrams; Your Majesty cannot be negligent in thinking them out thoroughly.

There is also the saying of Confucius, "He who learns but does not think is lost; he who thinks but does not learn is endangered." To learn means to make oneself thoroughly versed in a matter and actually put it into practice. For in the kind of learning pursued in the school of the Sages, if one does not seek it out in his own mind-and-heart he will be blind and not accomplish his objective; therefore it is absolutely necessary to think it out in order to fully comprehend even the most subtle aspects of the matter. If one does not make himself thoroughly versed in a matter, he will be endangered and not at ease; therefore it is absolutely necessary to learn in order to carry it out in actual practice. Thus thinking and learning mutually advance and mutually complement one another. My humble hope is that Your Majesty will deeply understand this principle. First of all, one must establish a firm intention [to pursue learning] with the thought, "What sort of man was [the sage] Shun? What sort of man am I? If I try, I too can be as he was [for he too was an ordinary human being]," and with a surge of strength vigorously apply oneself to both [thinking and learning].

And it is by the constant practice of mindfulness (*kyong, ching*) that one combines thought and learning; it is the single, consistent thread which runs through the states of both activity and quiet, that whereby one may harmonize and unify his inner [dispositions] and outward [activity], making that which is manifest one with that which is subtly latent. As for how one is to do this, he must preserve [the proper dispositions of] the mind by exercising strict composure and quiet recollection, and exhaustively investigate principle through study, inquiry, and the exercise of thought and discernment. "Before one is seen or heard [by others] is the time for one's heedfulness and caution to be all the more strict, all the more mindful; when one is in a hidden, secluded, solitary place is the time for one's self-examination to be all the more minute, all the more exact. If one takes up one diagram for consideration, he should entirely focus his attention on that diagram, as if he did not know there were any others; if one takes up one matter for practice, he should entirely focus his attention on that one matter as if ignorant that any other existed...

The practice of this kind of reverent fear and mindfulness is nothing extraordinary; it is simply part of everyday life, but it can bring about the "perfect equilibrium [of the mind before it is aroused] and perfect harmony [after it is aroused]," "establish [heaven and earth] in their proper positions and accomplish the nurture [of all things]." Virtuous conduct is simply a matter of proper human relationships, but through it the wondrous unity of Heaven and man is attained.

This is the purport of these diagrams and the explanations [which accompany them]. I have arranged them and set them forth on ten sheets of paper. If Your Majesty will ponder them and become thoroughly versed in them, simply applying himself to their study in moments of leisure during the course of his daily routine, he will find that the essential foundation for accomplishing the Tao and becoming a sage, and the source for exercising proper governance are contained therein. If Your Majesty will set his mind and intent on them and go over them repeatedly from beginning to end, neither taking them lightly and neglecting them, nor becoming bored and annoyed with them and setting them aside, then great will be the joy of the nation, great the joy of the people!..