

The Tao: Watercourse Way - Alan Watts

Water is the blood of the Earth, and flows through its muscles and veins. Therefore it is said that water is something that has complete faculties. It is accumulated in Heaven and Earth, and stored up in the various things (of the world). It comes forth in metal and stone, and is concentrated in living creatures. Therefore it is said that water is something spiritual. Being accumulated in plants and trees, their stems gain their orderly progression from it, their flowers obtain their proper number, and their fruits gain their proper measure. The bodies of birds and beasts, through having it, become fat and large; their feathers and hair become luxuriant, and their stripes and markings are made apparent. The reason why creatures can realize their potentialities and grow to the norm is that the inner regulation of their water is in accordance.

Man is water, and when the producing elements of male and female unite, liquid flows into forms. Thus water becomes accumulated in jade, and the nine virtues appear. It congeals to form man, and his nine openings and five viscera appear. This is its refined essence. What is it, then, that has complete faculties? It is water. There is not one of the various things, which is not produced through it. It is only he who knows how to rely (on its principles) who can act correctly. Hence the solution for the Sage who would transform the world lies in water. Therefore when water is uncontaminated, men's hearts are upright. When water is pure, the people's hearts are at ease. Men's hearts being upright, their desires do not become dissolute. The people's hearts being upright, their conduct is without evil. Hence the Sage, when he rules the world, does not teach men one by one, or house by house, but takes water as his key. The man of perfect virtue in repose has no thoughts in action and no anxiety. He recognizes no right, nor wrong, nor good, nor bad. Within the Four Seas, when all profit--that is his repose. Men cling to him as children who have lost their mothers; they rally around him as wayfarers who have missed their road. He has wealth to spare, but he knows not whence it comes. He has food and drink more than sufficient, but knows not who provides it. In an age of perfect virtue, good men are not appreciated; ability is not conspicuous. Rulers are mere beacons, while the people are as free as the wild deer. They are upright without being conscious of duty to their neighbors. They love one another without being conscious of charity. They are true without being conscious of loyalty. They are honest without being conscious of good faith. They act freely in all things without recognizing obligations to anyone. Thus, their deeds leave no trace; their affairs are not handed down to posterity.