

From: Shizuo Imaizumi
To: All the persons concerned
Subject: New Year's Message
Date: January 1, 2018

Happy New Year (Akemashite omedeto gozaimasu)! The year 2018 is the Year of the Dog as the eleventh of the twelve Chinese zodiac signs symbolized by eleven real animals and one mythical beast. In China and Japan, even nowadays, there is still a strong belief that a person's personality and fortune are affected by the sign of his or her year of birth. The new year in the lunar calendar begins on February 16 this year. If your year of birth matches with the year such as 1922, 1934, 1946, 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994 or 2006, that is the Year of the Dog respectively.

I would like to introduce to you the book: "The way of Chuang Tzu" by Thomas Merton (1915-1968), published in 1965 by New Directions Publishing Corporations. I possess its 1997 revised edition. Thomas Merton passed away in 1968. In July 1996, Dalai Lama called Merton "one of his Buddhist brothers" in his article entitled "A Tribute to Thomas Merton," and wrote:

"I have been moved a great deal today at this memorial or recollection of the life of Thomas Merton, and I am very happy that we have done this. From the point of view of a religious practitioner, and in particular as a monastic, Thomas Merton really is someone that we can look up to. From one point of view, he had the complete qualities of hearing — which means study, contemplating, thinking on the teachings — and of meditation. He also had the qualities of being learned, disciplined and having a good heart. He not only was able to practice himself, but his perspective was very, very broad. Thus it seems to me that in this memorial or recollection of him, we should seek to be following his example that he gave to us. In this way, even though the chapter of his life is over, what he was hoping to do and seeking to do can remain forever. ..."

[Quoted from an article entitled "A Tribute to Thomas Merton" by His Holiness the Dalai Lama on page 7 in "The way of Chuang Tzu" by Thomas Merton.]

"Chuang Tzu" of the Chinese classics consists of 33 chapters that are divided into the following three volumes: "naihen" or "volume inside" (chapters 1-7), "gaihen" or "volume outside" (chapters 8-22) and "zatsuhen" or "volume miscellaneous" (chapters 23-33). The period of events of the 62 stories Thomas Merton selected in his above book ranges from about 550 to 250 B.C. In his article entitled "A Note to the Reader," Merton wrote:

"Since I know only a few Chinese characters, I obviously am not a translator. These [four of the best translations of Chuang Tzu] "readings" are then not attempts a faithful reproduction but ventures in personal and spiritual interpretation. Inevitably, any rendering of Chuang Tzu is bound to be very personal. ... and though not all renderings can even qualify as "poetry," I believe that a certain type of reader will enjoy my intuitive approach to a thinker who is subtle, funny, provocative, — and not easy to get at. ..."

[Quoted from an article entitled "A Note to the Reader" on page 9 in the above book.]

For your reference, I selected the following story entitled “When the Shoe Fits” that was one of the 62 stories Thomas Merton wrote:

“Ch’ui the draftsman
Could draw more perfect circles freehand
Than with a compass.

His fingers brought forth
Spontaneous forms from nowhere. His mind
Was meanwhile free and without concern
With what he was doing.

No application was needed
His mind was perfectly simple
And knew no obstacle.

So, when the shoe fits
The foot is forgotten,
When the belt fits
The belly is forgotten,
When the heart is right
“For” and “against” are forgotten.

No drives, no compulsions,
No needs, no attractions:
Then your affairs
Are under control.
You are a free man.

Easy is right. Begin right
And you are easy.
Continue easy and you are right.
The right way to go easy
Is to forget the right way
And forget that the going is easy.”

[xix. 12.]

[Quoted from an article entitled “When the Shoe Fits” on pages 112-113 in the above book.]

Assuming that Thomas Merton wrote the above prose poem by reading four translations of “Chuang Tzu” in comparison with each of them, where should I find the equivalent paragraph of that poem? As Merton left the hint of [xix 12.] at the end of the poem, I deciphered that number as [chapter19 (xix)-paragraph 12] in the volume 2 entitled “gaihen” (chapters 8-22). Although I didn’t have an English edition at hand, I found its similar story in my possessive Japanese book entitled “Soushi” that is Japanese pronunciation of “Chuang Tzu.” Following are the lines corresponding to the poem by Thomas Merton.

I first mention the old Japanese rendering of Chinese characters of chapter19-paragraph 12 word for word. And then I translate each line into English by referring to the Japanese book: "Soushi" by Osamu Kanaya, published in 1971 by Iwanamishoten company, Tokyo, Japan.

"Kousui, meguraseba sunawachi kiku ni au.

"When Sui (Ch'ui), the carpenter moves his hands, either a ruler or a compass exactly fits any goods he creates.

Yubi wa mono to kashite, kokoro o motte todomezu.

As his fingers become one with material, there is no necessity of stopping his action with distracting his thoughts.

Yueni sono reidai wa, ichi ni site fusagarazu.

Therefore, his mind is purely simple and he acts without getting prepossessed anything else.

Ashi o wasururu wa, kutsu no teki nari.

A man forgets what he is endowed by nature with his foot because the shoe fits and he feels comfortable.

Koshi o wasururu wa, obi no teki nari.

A man forgets what he is endowed by nature with his waist because the belt fits and he feels comfortable.

Zehi o wasururu wa, kokoro no teki nari.

[In the same way,] a man forgets discrimination of right and wrong because the mind becomes one with its object and he feels comfortable.

Uchi ni henzezu, soto ni shitaga wazaru wa, jie no teki nari.

The reason why a man doesn't have a flurry of excitement inside and he isn't influenced by outer happenings is that he adapts well and he feels comfortable to any events.

Teki ni hajimarite, imada katte teki sezunba arazaru mono wa,
teki o wasururu no teki nari."

On the basis of comfortableness, the reason why a man feels comfortable whatever may happen is that he is always in a [unconscious] condition to be so comfortable as to forget that he feels comfortable."

[Translation from Japanese into English by Shizuo Imaizumi.]

To sum up, you just do what you are doing as if you are forgetting about doing it right this moment. Finally I suggest that you read Merton's poem again to further understand that. After that, I guess you increase awareness of the importance of "teki" or "comfortableness" or "being comfortable" in your daily life as well as in Aikido and weapons training at your dojo.

[END]

