

Crisis Management - The Taoist Art of Moderation (1)



When I feel overwhelmed by life, I turn to a tried and tested method: I take one of the wisdom books from my shelf and open a page at random. Whatever draws my attention, I take as a personal message, with which I then engage intensively.

Corona and the press releases that go with it do not leave me indifferent. It is now also clear to me that this global crisis will mark my life, professionally and personally, for months. So a few days ago, full of uneasy fears, I returned to Lao Tzu's advice. "Coincidence" chose for me the 59th chapter of Tao Te Ching, which seemed a perfect match. I would, therefore, like to share with you the wise advice which Venerable Master Lao Tzu offered me:

治人事天莫若嗇

*Governing the personality and devoting oneself to the spiritual -
there is nothing better for both than moderation.*

Tao Te Ching, 59, 1

Already, with the first verse, I feel caught out. It shows me how inappropriately I have been dealing with the subject of Corona over the past few days. Multiple times a day, I followed the latest reports on my smartphone, researched current articles, talked to others about them all the time, while my thoughts circled constantly around worrying visions of the future.

That may be human, but it is not Taoist. And it's not healthy at all! Our media rarely serve to provide factual information. In any case, they certainly do not know moderation. Rather, they serve our social craving for information and sensation. It became clear to me that without a certain media fast, it would be difficult for me to face this crisis constructively. Which is exactly what the second verse offered me:

夫唯嗇是謂早服

*Because moderation alone means
that we can react appropriately at an early stage.
Tao Te Ching; 59,2*

The key word of the 59th chapter of Tao Te Ching is 嗇 which means "thrift", „frugality“, „restraint“, "temperance" and "moderation". But moderation is completely alien to our species. Our world is suffering, and it suffers for this reason alone. This is also laid bare by the prevailing reaction of the population to the media insecurity: empty shelves in the supermarkets, battles for toilet paper – the embarrassing exposure of the egomania of a consumer-sick society. Or, to quote a valued student of ours: “When you see that the only concern of many people is to stock up on toilet paper, you can (as so often) just despair of humanity. People are only interested in how to make sure they can wipe their own poor little ass.” (Denise Ritter).

We are all aware that our world is suffering, but it suffers from our own lack of moderation in every area of our lives. The virus – our “enemy” – teaches us moderation. It relentlessly forces us to rediscover that virtue for ourselves. Suddenly the air in the Chinese province of Hubei, after drastic restrictions on public life in its capital, Wuhan, is as clean as it has been in decades. Venice, the historic city of sewage, suddenly has crystal-clear water in its canals. Mother

Nature is teaching us the healing power of moderation. And she's been doing it graciously so far. But what if the virus did not primarily kill the old and the sick, but our children — our future?

Speaking of killing, every year around 58,000 animal species disappear from this planet — wiped out by our global excesses. But it's not only Mother Nature who suffers. We humans, as part of her, suffer too. Air pollution alone kills hundreds of thousands of people in the world's major cities (for example: up to 25,000 a year in Cairo, the capital of Egypt). Our excesses kill ... and in the end they kill us.

That is why I take Lao Tzu's advice seriously in this, our Corona crisis. Corona is a challenge from our Mother Nature, no accident, no misfortune, no punishment. We are challenged to reflect and that is a great opportunity.

To be continued...

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