

READING: ZHUANGZI ON LIFE AND LEARNING

The text below is the beginning of *Zhuangzi* chapter 3, "The Secret of Caring for Life," which begins with a discussion of learning, followed by the story about Cook Ding already mentioned in the lecture. As you read through these stories, think to yourself about the following questions:

"Why do both stories above talk about different trades: a cook and a carpenter? What are these stories about?"

1. *Zhuangzi*, "The Secret of Caring for Life":

Cook Ding was cutting up an ox for Lord Wenhui. At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee -- zip, zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Jingshou music."

"Ah, this is marvelous!" said Lord Wenhui. "Imagine skill reaching such heights!" Cook Ding laid down his knife and replied, "What I care about is the Way (Dao), which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now -- now I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it want. I go along with the grains that are naturally there, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint.

"A good cook changes his knife once a year - because he cuts. A mediocre cook changes his knife once a month - because he hacks. I've had this knife of mine for nineteen year.; and I've cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the blade is as good as though it had just come from the grindstone. There are spaces between the joints, and the blade of the knife has really no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there's plenty of room -- more than enough for the blade to play about it. That's why after nineteen year, the blade of my knife is still as good as when it first come from the grindstone.

"However, whenever I come to a complicated place, I size up the difficulties, tell myself to watch out and be careful, keep my eyes on what I'm doing, work very slowly, and move the knife with the greatest subtlety, until - flop! the whole thing comes apart like a clod of earth crumbling to the ground. I stand there holding the knife and look all

around me, completely satisfied and reluctant to move on, and then I wipe off the knife and put it away." "Excellent!" said Lord Wenhui. "I have heard the words of Cook Ding and learned how to care for life!"

庖丁為文惠君解牛，手之所觸，肩之所倚，足之所履，膝之所踦，砉然騞然，奏刀騞然，莫不中音。合於《桑林》之舞，乃中《經首》之會。文惠君曰：「譔！善哉！技蓋至此乎？」庖丁釋刀對曰：「臣之所好者道也，進乎技矣。始臣之解牛之時，所見无非牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇，而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。技經肯綮之未嘗，而況大軋乎！良庖歲更刀，割也；族庖月更刀，折也。今臣之刀十九年矣，所解數千牛矣，而刀刃若新發於硎。彼節者有間，而刀刃者無厚，以無厚入有間，恢恢乎其於游刃必有餘地矣，是以十九年而刀刃若新發於硎。雖然，每至於族，吾見其難為，怵然為戒，視為止，行為遲。動刀甚微，謦然已解，如土委地。提刀而立，為之四顧，為之躊躇滿志，善刀而藏之。」文惠君曰：「善哉！吾聞庖丁之言，得養生焉。」

2. *Zhuangzi*, "In the World of Men"

Carpenter Shi went to Qi, and when he got to Crooked Shaft, he saw a serrate oak standing by the village shrine. It was broad enough to shelter several thousand oxen and measured a hundred spans around, towering above the hills. The lowest branches were eighty feet from the ground, and a dozen or so of them could be made into boats. There were so many sightseers that the place looked like a fair, but the carpenter didn't even glance around and went on his way without stopping. His apprentice stood staring for a long time and then ran after Carpenter Shi and said, "Since I first took up my ax and followed you, Master, I have never seen timber as beautiful as this. But you don't even bother to look, and go right on without stopping. Why is that?"

"Forget it -- say no more!" said the carpenter. "It's a worthless tree! Make boats out of it and they'd sink; make coffins out of it and they'd rot in no time; make vessels and they'd break at once. Use it for doors and it would sweat sap like pine; use it for posts and the worms would eat them up. It's not a timber tree - there's nothing it can be used for. That's how it got to be that old!"

After Carpenter Shi returned home, the oak tree appeared to him in a dream and said, "What are you comparing me with? Are you comparing me with those useful trees? The cherry apple, the pear, the orange, the citron, the rest of those fructiferous trees and shrubs - as soon as their fruit is ripe, they are torn apart and subjected to abuse. Their big limbs are broken off, their little limbs are yanked around. Their utility makes life miserable for them, and so they don't get to finish out the years Heaven gave them,

but are cut off in mid-journey. They bring it on themselves -- the pulling and tearing of the common mob. And it is the same way with all other things. "As for me, I've been trying a long time to be of no use, and though I almost died, I've finally got it. This is of great use to me. If I had been of some use, would I ever have grown this large? Moreover, you and I are both of us things. What's the point of this -- things condemning things? You, a worthless man about to die -- how do you know I'm a worthless tree?"

When Carpenter Shi woke up, he reported his dream. His apprentice said, "If it's so intent on being of no use, what's it doing there at the village shrine?" "Shhh! Say no more! It is only resting there. If we carp and criticize, it will only conclude that we don't understand it. Even if it weren't at the shrine, do you suppose it would be cut down? It protects itself in a different way from ordinary people. If you try to judge it by conventional standards, you'll be way off!"

匠石之齊，至乎曲轅，見櫟社樹。其大蔽數千牛，絜之百圍，其高臨山十仞而後有枝，其可以為舟者旁十數。觀者如市，匠伯不顧，遂行不輟。弟子厭觀之，走及匠石，曰：「自吾執斧斤以隨夫子，未嘗見材如此其美也。先生不肯視，行不輟，何邪？」曰：「已矣，勿言之矣！散木也，以為舟則沈，以為棺槨則速腐，以為器則速毀，以為門戶則液樅，以為柱則蠹。是不材之木也，無所可用，故能若是之壽。」

匠石歸，櫟社見夢曰：「女將惡乎比予哉？若將比予於文木邪？夫柤、梨、橘、柚、果、蓀之屬，實熟則剝，剝則辱，大枝折，小枝泄。此以其能苦其生者也，故不終其天年而中道夭，自掊擊於世俗者也。物莫不若是。且予求無所可用久矣，幾死，乃今得之，為予大用。使予也而有用，且得有此大也邪？且也，若與予也皆物也，奈何哉其相物也？而幾死之散人，又惡知散木！」匠石覺而診其夢。弟子曰：「趣取無用，則為社何邪？」曰：「密！若無言！彼亦直寄焉，以為不知己者詬厲也。不為社者，且幾有翦乎！且也，彼其所保，與眾異，以義譽之，不亦遠乎！」

(Adapted from *Sources of Chinese Traditions*, pp. 106 - 107)

(SCT, 95; 103-104)