

Questions and Answers About Confucianism

1.) What does practicing Confucianism mean to you in your daily life?

Confucianism has absolutely changed my life. It has had as profound an effect on me as my Christian baptism, my marriage, and the birth of my children. What it means in my daily life is that I strive for self-cultivation daily and work daily for the prosperity and peace of the people. It is with me like my shadow.

2.) Do you personally consider Confucianism to be a religion, philosophy, or something different? Please explain why.

I see it as a philosophic commitment. It is a school of thought like Stoicism. It says that if you worship, then worship sincerely, but does not dictate religious worship or define a religion. It describes a way of life.

3.) Take us through your daily life as a practicing Confucianism.

The major Confucian practices, in my view, are (1) study, (2) introspection (to improve yourself), and (3) working to improve, support, and build up one's community.

I study every day. I'll study a Confucian scholar, or a Western scholar, or I'll study the Bible. I consider carefully what I study. As an example, within a Confucian work called the **Great Learning**, I discovered what I see as a plan for the interaction of education and society. I started the *Timeless Way Foundation* to promote this vision of education and have posted a Power Point presentation in PDF on the website:

http://www.timelesswayfoundation.org/Unleashing_the_Power_of_Education.pdf

I think about the 8 steps in the Winding Spring Process and consider if I'm exercising any of these steps. I will consider one of the lists of virtues Kongzi (Confucius) discussed and then think about them in my life. I share some of this with others. Here is a blog post that relates the love of learning to other virtues. This post discusses Analect 17.8

<http://educationforthe21stcentury.blogspot.com/2008/03/character-education-and-love-of.html>

I think the version of 27.8 in my book is easier to read than the one I posted, which is partly why I wrote my book: "**Achieve Lasting Happiness, Timeless Secrets to Transform Your Life.**"

I have friends who are Buddhists so occasionally in my daily introspection I consider the Eightfold Path. The last time I pondered the Eightfold path, I thought Christianity had more power to transform the heart. So my thinking about the Eightfold path turned to thinking about the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23.

The goals of a Confucian are a sincere heart and the betterment of the people, so I work hard every year to reform education.

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- 4.) How does practicing Confucianism reflect your experiences as a Texan? Our book talks about Confucianism as a Popular Chinese Religion, so does this idea clash with being a Texan?

I believe the best qualities of a Texan are (1) grit, (2) heart, and (3) wisdom. These correspond to a list of 3 Confucian virtues (1) courage (grit), (2) humanity (heart), and (3) wisdom. This list of three Confucian virtues is listed on page 54 of “Centrality and Commonality, An Essay on Confucian Religiousness” by Tu Wei-Ming.

The relationship of the Chinese to Confucianism is complex. Their love of learning, for example, is very Confucian, except they practice a corrupted version of the love of learning that has been preached against by Confucian sages like Chu Hsi. Contemporary Chinese have, I believe, a flawed relationship to Confucianism. The popularity of Confucianism in China is as likely to corrupt Confucian teachings as to uplift the Chinese people.

Americans are free to interpret Confucianism in light of Western culture exactly because it is a philosophy and not a religion. I believe Confucianism could be a greater engine of positive change in Texas than in China because it is fresh and new in Texas.

- 5.) Proper execution of duties is one of the main principles of Confucianism, how do you interpret this in your daily life.

I try every day to make this a better world. This is how I exercise my duties as a Confucian. I am presently running for the local school board. See my blog posts related to morality and good leadership as I run for political office:

<http://voteforcanright.blogspot.com/2007/03/moral-principle-is-root-of-education.html>
<http://voteforcanright.blogspot.com/2007/04/morality-and-education.html>
<http://voteforcanright.blogspot.com/2008/04/in-defence-of-liberty.html>
<http://voteforcanright.blogspot.com/2008/02/america-needs-good-leaders-and-plano.html>

Preaching morality is a Confucian tradition and I do it publicly.

I think it is our duty in our country to be involved politically for the betterment of society, not as a contest for power or the corruption of influence peddling.

Don't forget that duty is very important for some Westerners too.

- 6.) Do you practice Ren (jen) and if so what does this mean to you. Same question for Li.

I see Ren as a love of humanity. Compassion and benevolence are a part of it. Ren is our interaction as humans building each other up as humans. It is more than compassion and benevolence. It is nourishing the connection between us all that makes us human.

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Humans do not live in isolation. Practicing Ren means that everything you do is put in the context of the impact your actions have on others. Take a look at the novel, "Howard's End" by E.M. Forster. On the title page it says this, "Only connect..."

Look at Western science. To determine scientific truth you must have independent verification of experiments. This means you cannot have Western science without a form of connectedness similar to what is valued by Confucians: working out differences to achieve harmony.

In running for the school board I am recommending we create a community compact to clarify community values and build more commitment to living up to our higher values. This is a Confucian method motivated by Ren.

Li is complex. Originally Li was described by Confucius as propriety and ritual. Ritual is intended to strengthen connectedness, so when my daughter's high school football team got into the playoffs, I went to every game, even driving from Plano to Austin. I don't care about football, but I went and cheered because it is a community ritual. (Go Wildcats!) I eventually found myself caring about the outcome. When we lost the 5-A state championship to Trinity Eules in double over-time, that really hurt. That shows that ritual can work to develop emotional connection. (Yes, Trinity played Judson Converse next for the title, but that was an effortless win. The real contest was Plano vs. Trinity.)

I just bought a book, "Choosing Civility" by P.M. Forni. Civility is a form of propriety. Our kids sporting events have too many parents acting like lunatics. This is a perfect point of entry for a discussion on civility.

The Neo-Confucians view Li as "principle." Originally Li meant "pattern," and I see principle meaning the pattern of morality reflected in the universe. In the West this is called "Natural Law." Within my daily practice of Confucianism I look for the juxtaposition of Western and Confucian moral principles. I look to compare and contrast and ponder what I find. For example, Cicero has these 4 virtues: (1) justice, (2) wisdom, (3) courage, and (4) moderation.

<http://www.idehist.uu.se/distans/ilmh/Ren/civic-virtue.htm>

Compare and contrast these 4 with the 5 virtues of Confucianism:

http://www.achievelastinghappiness.com/five_virtues.html

Courage is in other lists of Confucian virtues. You do not see a lot about moderation in Confucian writings because there was so much poverty. What's really a striking difference is "justice." Justice is a Western concept. The East has not had democracies or republics like the West. Justice is in our pattern of morality, but not in the Eastern.

Summarizing Li: I am mindful of propriety, I respect ritual, and I look for moral principle in the world around me, including the world of cultural constructs.

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- 7.) How, to you, can you distinguish Confucian as a God? How does this differ from the worshipping of other religious Gods?

A real Confucian would view the worship of Confucius as superstitious nonsense. It is a mistake. I know no Confucians with that view. I am a Christian. I can tell you a major difference between Christianity and Confucianism: Christianity offers you salvation for your immortal soul, but offers nothing for your prosperity while Confucianism offers the hope of prosperity and worldly peace, but is silent about an afterlife.

- 8.) Are there any rites of passage acknowledged by the Confucian religion? (e.g. birth, puberty, marriage and death)

Confucian rituals are really social rituals. They belong to individual cultures. American Confucianism is not organized enough to have its own rituals.

The Chinese have a book, the Book of Rites, called the Li Ki. I believe the work called the *Doctrine of the Mean* was a chapter in that work. I am not really interested in Chinese rituals, so I have not read the book. Scholars have already gone through that work and found the *Doctrine of the Mean*, so I believe what is universal has been discovered within the book already.

- 9.) Our book stresses the importance of filial piety throughout life and death. Is this idea important in your life and if so can you explain?

Respecting parents was already a part of my Christian beliefs, but Confucianism reinforces it. I pointed out to my daughter that in the 10 Commandments, after the commandments about God, “honor your mother and father,” is before, “do not commit murder.” That says a lot about the importance of respecting your parents. I am not a Catholic, nor a Mormon. I believe as a Christian that once your parents are dead, they have gone before God and your prayers cannot affect the judgment they received.

Filial piety, in the fashion of the Chinese, is a Chinese cultural practice that does not have to be transferred to other cultures that have no history of ancestor worship.

Here is a good description of the emotions associated by Asians regarding filial piety. The occasion is an adult son at his father’s death bed:

“I feel to the bottom of my heart that my flesh and blood are something that came from my father. This person on whom I am laying my hand is my father, who brought me into the world. He is a part of my flesh, and that part of me is dying.”

“Until then I had felt that my father was a different being, but this time, looking at him in front of me, I felt that we really were one body – just like a new cactus stuck to the stem of the old one. I came to understand how my father felt about me, his son. I came to understand his heart. My father who brought me into this world is dying.... I feel as if my father is with me in my heart.”

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The quote is from “*Confucianism for the Modern World*,” edited by Daniel A. Bell, page 174. Filial piety has a lot of meaning for the Chinese.

As a Christian I believe children are a blessing from God, but I believe my life is from God the creator and my parents are God’s servants in bringing me up as a Christian.

Confucian writings do teach the sentiments described in the quote, but I see that as a reflection of Chinese culture. I have had people tell me only Chinese can be Confucians, but that is only true if Confucianism is equivalent to being Chinese. I can never be Chinese, but I believe we can put aside those precise implementations of Chinese culture that are not a precise match to our culture. I believe we can adapt the spirit of the Confucian teachings on filial piety by recognizing the importance of parental respect taught in Christianity and in Western culture.

Additional Comments

I believe America is in a serious leadership crisis. Both Washington and Wall Street are failing. I believe the lessons in Confucianism regarding leadership, administration, and governance can help turn rejuvenate American leadership. This is part of my campaign for the local school board.

Here is where I blog on the leadership crisis

<http://thetimelessway.blogspot.com/>

Here is where I blog on American Confucianism

<http://newconfucian.blogspot.com/>

and

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TimelessWayDallas/>

Here is Confucianism in education

<http://educationforthe21stcentury.blogspot.com/>

Confucianism can help America. It is my duty to contribute to a better future for America. I am confident Confucianism will play an important role in our country. I just hope it doesn’t take more than 20 years to begin to really take off because I might not be here to help.