
Imagery And Symbolism In Tao Te Ching

Imagery and symbolism are one of the most commonly used styles as far as literature is concerned. Imagery refers to the creation of images or pictures in the people's minds by use of descriptive or figurative language. Imagery aims at adding weight to literary or artistic work. Symbolism on the other hand refers to representation of the author's thoughts, ideas, opinions and even qualities by using symbols. Tao Te Ching, translated by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo, is a historical Taoist work, attributed to Lao Tzu. In the 81 verses of Tao, Lao-Tzu employs a number of images and symbols such as water, motherhood, infancy, and uncarved block to depict the Tao i.e. the way and its virtues including religion, legalism, moral behavior. This paper will focus on two of these images, water and the uncarved block, to discuss their symbolic portrayal about the Tao and direction they provide for developing moral and appropriate behavior. The paper will also evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of these images and their convenience in deciding the manner in which one should act. This essay examines two of these images, water and the uncarved block, in order to disseminate their symbolic representation of the Tao and its direction for moral and appropriate behavior. This essay will also assess both the effectiveness of the image and its usefulness in determining the way in which one should act.

Water is one of the most emphasized symbol by Lao Tzu throughout the book. Symbolically, water has been employed to signify the unending goodness of the Tao. Lao Tzu has used this symbol to show and teach people to act and treat everybody with equality and without any form of discrimination or judgments. "Best be like water/ which benefits the ten thousand things/ and does not contend/ it pools where humans disdain to dwell/close to the Tao (8: 1-5). Take an example of water, it springs its goodness to all, including plants, in equal measures. It holds no judgments towards its generosity. It is just awesome. Similarly to Tao which also befits all and does not raise any disturbance. Water is essentially good and cannot be substituted: "The highest goodness resembles water" (8: 1).

Also, Lao Tzu tries to compare a person with great virtue to flowing water. "Water greatly benefits myriad things without contention... It stays in places that people dislike... Therefore it is similar to the Tao" (8: 2-4). A virtuous person who puts him or herself in a perfect place. He further relates a virtuous person's minds and heart to the flowing water. For instance, the mind of a virtuous person is calm and peaceful. Also, his heart is of great benefit not only to his friends but also to his or her enemies. Generally, water is very essential and we all ought to be like it for the better good of the world. All these descriptions play an important role in shaping the behavior as well as the morals of a person in a community.

The use of water has been quite effective in delivering the authors message. Through the symbolic nature of water, we are now able to understand our roles and responsibilities as far as our characters, behaviors, and attitudes towards society are concerned. Also, the imagery has expounded our thinking and take of things. It is also clear from the book that we all need to act like water when executing our services as well as other duties. As it states in the Tao Te Ching, one must be able to think deeply, be kind, sincere, just, and work when necessary. The entire point is to flow or move without getting into any conflicts with others or with nature (8: 6-14). In addition, we should demonstrate all the attributes of water like right timing, contention, a

softness that penetrates through hard rocks, free flow, and generosity among others. “Nothing in the world is softer or weaker than water....Yet nothing is better at overcoming the hard and strong” (78: 1-2). From this, it is clear that water imagery is a big analogy that the author has explored in explaining the Tao. Also, by using something familiar to us i.e. water, the author effectively made the Tao relatable to us so that we can try to live and be like it i.e. being humble, flexible, moral, non-judgmental etc.

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