



DISEASE

The character for disease (病) is made up of several elements. The first part was originally a tree divided down the middle (木), the left side (床) of which is thick and strong enough to be a bed. An individual lies (一) on this bed suffering from a fever (疔), a modification of the ideograms for fire (火) in the house (宀).

KNOWING THE DISEASE

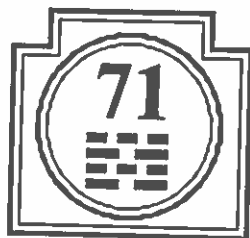
To know that you do not know is best.
To not know of knowing is a disease.

Indeed, to be sick of the disease,
Is the way to be free of the disease.

Evolved Individuals are free of the disease.
Because they are sick of the disease

This is the way to be free of disease.

Evolved Individuals are always aware that there is something they do not know. In the Taoist view, it is considered a great misfortune to be unconscious of one's ignorance, whether in worldly matters, interpersonal affairs, or within the self. Those who are developing personal power learn to recognize an ever-evolving universe of information that they have yet to experience. This attitude is paramount in the personal development of Evolved Individuals. It frees them from the decline that comes from being too full and too complete to grow further.



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SEVENTY-ONE

Knowing ignorance is strength.
Ignoring knowledge is sickness.

If one is sick of sickness, then one is not sick.
The sage is not sick because he is sick of sickness.
Therefore he is not sick.



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1. From knowing to not knowing (*chih, pu chih*),

This is superior.

From not knowing to knowing (*pu chih, chih*),

This is sickness.

It is by being sick of sickness,

That one is not sick.

2. The sage is not sick.

Because he is sick of sickness,

Therefore he is not sick.

General Comment

The preceding chapter uses *chih*, to know or to understand the simple and easy, five times. In this chapter *chih* is looked upon as either a forward or backward movement. The forward-knowing process is a disease; the backward-unknowing process leads to health.

Detailed Comment

1. Most commentators read the first four lines this way:

To know, yet to think that one does not know, is superior.

To be not knowing, yet to think that one knows, is sickness.

Such a reading would put the *Tao Te Ching* in company with Confucius and Socrates. When Confucius said “When you know say that you know, when you don’t know say that you don’t know. This is knowledge” (*Analects* 2: 17), he spoke of the need for intellectual honesty. Someone who knows, yet thinks that he does not know, is a humble person; someone who does not know, yet thinks that he knows, deceives himself. Socrates was the wisest of mortals because he knew that he did not know. Others who did not know yet thought that they did know had to be shown that their so-called knowledge was ignorance. Life’s goal for both Confucius and Socrates was to attain true knowledge or wisdom.

The *Tao Te Ching*, not regarding the acquisition of knowledge as conducive to union with Tao, cannot join the company of Confucius and Socrates. We must not only know that our knowledge is foolishness, but out of this awakening we

must embrace our original foolishness full heartedly and so abandon any search for knowledge. The movement from knowing to not knowing restores us to Tao, but the movement from not knowing to knowing, or from the unconscious to the conscious, is a movement away from Tao. Knowledge, sharpening the divisions among beings, is sickness.

The phrase *chih pu chih* (to know not to know) in the first line echoes *yü pu yü* (to desire not to desire) and *hsüeh pu hsüeh* (to learn not to learn) in chapter 64.5. They are all restorative movements which heal the rift caused by consciousness.

2. While others move from the unknowing state to the knowing state, falling into sickness in the process (ch. 2), the sage returns from knowing to not knowing and thereby does not contract the disease of a consciousness cut off from its root.