

**SELECTIONS FROM THE CONFUCIAN ANALECTS:  
GENERAL SELECTIONS ON FILIAL PIETY AND HUMANENESS**

**Introduction**

Confucius (the Latinized version of Kong Fuzi, “master Kong”) or, to call him by his proper name, Kong Qiu (551-479 BCE) lived during the time when the Zhou kingdom had disintegrated into many de facto independent feudal states which were subject to the Zhou kings only in theory. Confucius was a man of the small feudal state of Lu. Like many other men of the educated elite class of the Eastern Zhou, Confucius traveled among the states, offering his services as a political advisor and official to feudal rulers and taking on students whom he would teach for a fee. Confucius had an unsuccessful career as a petty bureaucrat, but a highly successful one as a teacher. A couple of generations after his death, first- and second-generation students gathered accounts of Confucius’ teachings together. These anecdotes and records of short conversations go under the English title of the *Analects*.

**Document Excerpts with Questions** (Longer selection follows this section)

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*Selections from the Confucian Analects*

1:2            Master You [You Ruo] said, “Among those who are filial toward their parents and fraternal toward their brothers, those who are inclined to offend against their superiors are few indeed. Among those who are disinclined to offend against their superiors, there have never been any who are yet inclined to create disorder. The noble person concerns himself with the root; when the root is established, the Way is born. Being filial and fraternal – is this not the root of humaneness?”

2:3            The Master said, “Lead them by means of regulations and keep order among them through punishments, and the people will evade them and will lack any sense of shame.<sup>1</sup> Lead them through moral force (*de*) and keep order among them through rites (*li*), and they will have a sense of shame and will also correct themselves.”

4:5            The Master said, “Wealth and honor are what people desire, but one should not abide in them if it cannot be done in accordance with the Way. Poverty and lowliness are what people dislike, but one should not avoid them if it cannot be done in accordance with the Way. If the noble person rejects humaneness, how can he fulfill that name? The noble person does not

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<sup>1</sup> Or, as Arthur Waley interprets it, “self-respect.”

abandon humaneness for so much as the space of a meal. Even when hard-pressed he is bound to it, bound to it even in time of danger.”

4:16           The Master said, “The noble person is concerned with rightness; the small person is concerned with profit.”

**Questions:**

1. What does Confucius mean by “filial piety?” How does the concept of filial piety give shape to the relations between parents and children and between rulers and subjects?
2. What assumptions does Confucius make about human nature when he says that one should lead the people through moral force rather than regulations and keep order among them through rites rather than punishments?
3. What is humaneness and why does Confucius consider it to be so important?
4. How would a government founded on Confucian principles compare to your own government?
5. Are Confucian principles relevant to the issues of practical life?

**Longer Selection**

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*Selections from the Confucian Analects*

1:1           The Master said, “To learn, and at due times to practice what one has learned, is that not also a pleasure? To have friends come from afar, is that not also a joy? To go unrecognized, yet without being embittered, is that not also to be a noble person?”

1:2           Master You [You Ruo] said, “Among those who are filial toward their parents and fraternal toward their brothers, those who are inclined to offend against their superiors are few indeed. Among those who are disinclined to offend against their superiors, there have never been any who are yet inclined to create disorder. The noble person concerns himself with the root; when the root is established, the Way is born. Being filial and fraternal – is this not the root of humaneness?”

1:3           The Master said, “Those who are clever in their words and pretentious in their appearance, yet are humane, are few indeed.”

1:8 The Master said, “If the noble person is not serious,<sup>2</sup> he will not inspire awe, nor will his learning be sound. One should abide in loyalty and trustworthiness and should have no friends who are not his equal.<sup>3</sup> If one has faults, one should not be afraid to change.”

2:3 The Master said, “Lead them by means of regulations and keep order among them through punishments, and the people will evade them and will lack any sense of shame.<sup>4</sup> Lead them through moral force (*de*) and keep order among them through rites (*li*), and they will have a sense of shame and will also correct themselves.”

2:7 Ziyou asked about filial devotion. The Master said, “Nowadays filial devotion means being able to provide nourishment. But dogs and horses too can provide nourishment. Unless one is reverent, where is the difference?”

3:4 Lin Fang asked about what is fundamental in rites. The Master said, “This is indeed a great question. In rites, it is better to be sparing than to be excessive. In mourning, it is better to express grief than to emphasize formalities.”

3:12 “Sacrifice as if they were present” means to sacrifice to the spirits as if they were present. The Master said, “If I am not present at the sacrifice, it is as if there were no sacrifice.”

3:19 Duke Ding asked how a ruler should employ his ministers and how ministers should serve their ruler. Confucius replied, “The ruler should employ the ministers according to ritual; the ministers should serve the ruler with loyalty.”

4:2 The Master said, “One who is not humane is able neither to abide for long in hardship nor to abide for long in joy. The humane find peace in humaneness; the knowing derive profit from humaneness.”

4:5 The Master said, “Wealth and honor are what people desire, but one should not abide in them if it cannot be done in accordance with the Way. Poverty and lowliness are what people dislike, but one should not avoid them if it cannot be done in accordance with the Way. If the noble person rejects humaneness, how can he fulfill that name? The noble person does not abandon humaneness for so much as the space of a meal. Even when hard-pressed he is bound to it, bound to it even in time of danger.”

4:16 The Master said, “The noble person is concerned with rightness; the small person is concerned with profit.”

6:28 Zigong said, “What would you say of someone who broadly benefited the people and was able to help everyone? Could he be called humane?” The Master said, “How would this be a matter of humaneness? Surely he would have to be a sage? Even Yao and Shun were concerned about such things. As for humaneness — you want to establish yourself; then

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<sup>2</sup> Literally, “heavy” or “weighty.”

<sup>3</sup> I.e., in moral terms.

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 1, above.

help others to establish themselves. You want to develop yourself; then help others to develop themselves. Being able to recognize oneself in others, one is on the way to being humane.”<sup>5</sup>

7:29           The Master said, “Is humaneness far away? If I want to be humane, then humaneness is here.”

11:11           Jilu asked about serving spiritual beings. The Master said, “Before you have learned to serve human beings, how can you serve spirits?” “I venture to ask about death.” “When you do not yet know life, how can you know about death?”

12:1           Yan Yuan asked about humaneness. The Master said, “Through mastering oneself and returning to ritual one becomes humane. If for a single day one can master oneself and return to ritual, the whole world will return to humaneness. Does the practice of humaneness come from oneself or from others?” Yan Yuan said, “May I ask about the specifics of this?” The Master said, “Look at nothing contrary to ritual; listen to nothing contrary to ritual; say nothing contrary to ritual; do nothing contrary to ritual.” Yan Yuan said, “Though unintelligent, Hui<sup>6</sup> requests leave to put these words into practice.”

12:2           Zhonggong [Ran Yong] asked about humaneness. The Master said, “When going abroad, treat everyone as if you were receiving a great guest; when employing the people, do so as if assisting in a great sacrifice. What you do not want for yourself, do not do to others. There should be no resentment in the state, and no resentment in the family.” Zhonggong said, “Though unintelligent, Yong requests leave to put these words into practice.”

12:3           Sima Niu asked about humaneness. The Master said, “The humane person is cautious in his speech.”<sup>7</sup> Sima Niu said, “Cautious of speech! Is this what you mean by humaneness?” The Master said, “When doing it is so difficult, how can one be without caution in speaking about it?”

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<sup>5</sup> Literally, “The ability to take what is near and grasp the analogy may be called the direction of humaneness.”

<sup>6</sup> Referring to himself.

<sup>7</sup> There is a pun here, humaneness (*ren*) being a homophone of “cautious” (*ren*). The two are written with different Chinese characters.