

Do Not Look at What is not in Accordance with Decorum; Do Not Listen to What is Not in Accordance with Decorum

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(Clearwisdom.net) What one sees and hears has a subtle influence on one's thoughts and moral values. Once a notion is deeply rooted in one's heart, it becomes habitual and natural. Naturally, such a notion will be reflected in one's conduct. As Confucius said, "Do not look at what is not in accordance with decorum; do not listen to what is not in accordance with decorum; do not speak when it is not in accordance with decorum; do not act when it is not in accordance with decorum."

In "Melt Into the Fa" in *Essentials for Further Advancement* Master Li Hongzhi also said,

"A person is like a container, and he is whatever he contains. All of what a person sees with the eyes and hears with the ears are: violence, lust, power struggles in literary works, struggles for profit in the practical world, money worship, other manifestations of demon-nature, and so on. With his head filled with these, this kind of person is truly a bad person, no matter what he appears to be. A person's behavior is dictated by his thoughts. With a mind full of such things, what's a person able to do?"

In *Zizhi Tongjian*, (an important Chinese history text) there is an account of how Jia Yi, then the Primer Minister of the State of Liang, appealed to Emperor Hanwen with regard to how to educate the prince

in virtue and decorum. In the appeal, he said:

"Once upon a time there was a great emperor in ancient times who followed the rule of decorum to treat his prince as soon as he was born. Well dressed and well behaved, all the officials were on the way to the southern part of the city to celebrate. Whenever they passed by a gate of the emperor, they got off the cart and paid their respects. Whenever they passed by a temple, they walked quickly with small steps. As a result, from the time he was an infant, the prince started to learn everything about virtue and decorum.

"When the prince became older and had a better understanding of things, the responsible officials started to teach him filial piety, benevolence, ritual, and mutual obligation. They kept him away from wicked people and wicked conduct. In the meantime, the emperor began to prudently choose among ordinary people those who were honest, respectful to their parents, loved their brothers and sisters, and were knowledgeable and capable of administrating the nation to protect, help, and get along with the prince.

"From the time he was born, the prince had seen only righteous conduct, heard only righteous speeches, and was surrounded by only honest people. Just as people who lived in the State of Qi could only speak the Qi dialect, the prince, who had been surrounded by only honest and righteous people, would naturally have righteous thoughts, give righteous speeches, and act righteously. In contrast, whoever lives with dishonest people will gradually become dishonest, just as whoever lived in the State of Chu would have to speak the Chu dialect.

"Confucius said, 'As habit formed from a very early age is to one's character, what's habitual becomes natural.' When learning decorum and developing intelligence go together, they strengthen each other so that sharing one's thoughts will not be an issue at all. As one is educated, one's own opinions are also formed. In the end, virtue and decorum

become just like one's inborn character.

"The reason that the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties lasted for such long periods of time is because of the system that educated and helped the princes. In the Qin Dynasty, however, things changed dramatically. The First Qin Emperor (Qin Shi Huang) dispatched Zhao Gao to become the teacher of Hu Hai, the emperor's second son. What Zhao taught Hu was court judgments and sentencing, including executing people, cutting people's nostrils, and annihilating the three generations of a family. The second day Hu became the new emperor, he shot arrows at people, took those who were brave enough to honestly criticize as slandering the administration, and labeled those who were thoughtful of the nation's future as deceiving the public with wicked speeches. In addition, he treated killing people as casually as cutting grass. Was that because of Hu's vicious inborn character? Certainly not. It was the result of Zhao Gao's teachings that induced Hu to learn all these wicked things.

"Northerners or southerners, when they were first born, they cried in the same way, and they all desired to drink milk. As they have grown up, however, they have learned different customs, formed different habits, and started to speak different languages. The dialects they speak often differ so much that they cannot understand each other even with an interpreter. Some people vow that they would rather die than live in the other region. Such a tremendous difference comes entirely from education and habit.

"That is why I insist that it is imperative to choose who comes in contact and associates with the prince and educate him as early as possible."

There is a saying, "He who nears red ink (or vermilion) shall become red; he who touches black ink (or pitch) shall become black." The environment has a great influence on one's virtue and decorum. He who

nears the good becomes good; he who nears the bad becomes bad. If everyone we have contact with is honest and righteous, if all we see and hear are healthy and good visual arts, good books, or good music, we will naturally be positively influenced and develop in the right direction. On the other hand, if all we are in touch with are wicked and vicious people and if all we are filled with are lust and violence, we will develop in the wrong direction or start to decay.

CATEGORY: Traditional Culture