

## Conscience and Forgiveness

While on jury duty a few weeks ago, I had a LOT of time to think about our justice system and its function in society; was often reminded of some comments from the Tao Te Ching:

When the Way is forgotten  
Duty and justice appear;  
Then knowledge and wisdom are born  
Along with hypocrisy.

....

When the Tao is lost there is virtue  
When virtue is lost there is humaneness  
When humaneness is lost there is justice  
And when justice is lost there is propriety.

Jury duty is a strange situation -- extremely fair (nobody gets to leave unless everyone can be excused) and yet weirdly inhumane (everyone must stay even if there is no need for it). It felt strange to be sitting in a place where I felt lied to even by the clothing choices (the defendant was dressed in a tan pullover sweater, most likely on advice of his lawyers -- I don't think even Jesus would wear this kind of clothing in NYC). It's a shame we even need a justice system today. Haven't we developed better ways to settle disputes? Is punishment actually useful as a solution or a deterrent? Is there some way to recognize that an injustice has been done without turning it into liar's game?

I am wondering if I also use my own conscience in a similarly downgraded way. So often, my sense of conscience is hijacked by defensiveness, aggression, guilt or something else. I envy those people who seem to have a relationship with right and wrong that brings out their courage rather than exaggerations and reactivity. True conscience would have to be based on compassion and a basic sense of rightness with the world -- a fruit of the Tao. Maybe forgiveness is actually the true action of conscience.