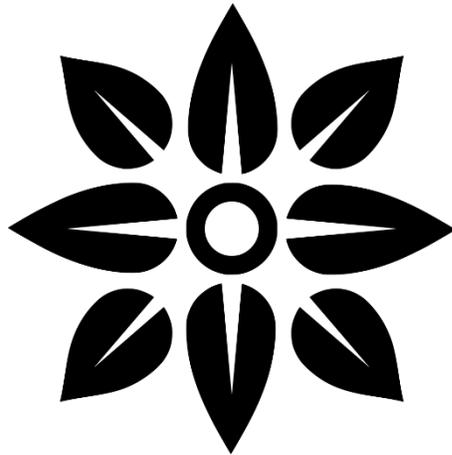


The Journey



Tenets

For one to follow these teachings, they begin a journey with no end, walk a road that spans a lifetime, follow a path they may walk from their birth to their death. To step from the path, to abandon its teachings and forget its lessons, is one's own choice. But the humble writer of these words pleads that one would at least keep the memory of these words in their hearts, in their minds, even if they should stray from the way set before by them. These texts are meant as merely a guide, not an authority on life or a zealot's gospel.

They are merely a container, for which the writer of these words has preserved his wisdom and knowledge, so those who wish to follow in his trail, may learn to see the world as though through his own eyes and understand it as he himself once did.

For one to be wise, to be virtuous, to be great, they must learn to control themselves, and eventually master their self. For one can not claim dominion of a handful of dirt or ownership of the most docile of creatures if they are not masters of their own emotions. Even joy, pure and clean, can become as dangerous a poison as rage if not properly reigned. Emotions are natural, but they should not rule you. If you must cry and grieve, cry and grieve, if you must smile and laugh, smile and laugh, but do let these feelings rule you. One must also take care not to smother their feelings, and only master and control them. For a man who has no emotion is as much of a man as lake without water is a lake....

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...Efficiency, to act without it, it is to act wastefully. A moment spent aligning a blade saves the hand from its edge, tending a fire removes the need to build another. Such is the balance one must have in life. For one can overwork and overthink, just as one can be lazy or refuse to ponder the world around them. Excess of either is foolishness, one must know and learn when to do more and when to do less. A single spear may end a panther's life, a day of work can save a week of labor, just as a season of toil can allow for two of rest, or how the time spent forging a sturdier lock will prevent a thief from taking one's hard earned wealth or treasures.

Efficiency, is not always the quickest path, and it is not always the longest. it stands, not in the middle of the road, but throughout its entirety. To learn to find efficiency, whether for an action as simple as boiling water or as large as building a city, is a talent that few have inborn, and one that many will need time to learn...

The gravest sin, the greatest act of foolishness one can commit, is to chase and spend their energy, wealth or power in the pursuit of life's base pleasures. Gluttony, Lust, Revenge, Rest without work, and many more names are attributed to this most deadly of sins. Men may be beasts, Men may be animals, but to act as such is a sign of utter stupidity. A merely satiated stomach is much more pleasant than one filled to bursting, the love of a single partner more fulfilling than the touch of many, Understanding brings more peace to one's soul than blood revenge.

Excess, the name of this devil, this curse, this scourge upon man! Know this, students of this humble writer's words, Hedonism in life, is to invite the most terrible of punishments upon your

fellow man and to corrupt and ruin your very soul. Decadence has brought only ruin to mankind throughout its history, learn the signs of its presence so you may make outcasts of the gospels of this religion of decay, this cult of...

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From the farmer with nothing, to the king with everything, all life holds value. Every man is equal in this regard. Talent, Title, ability and form mean add and subtract nothing from this value. It is inborn in every life, no matter the creed, race, code, belief, or standing of said life. None may remove this value, and none may debase it. The fowl one has for dinner is just as valuable as their own existence, remember this. For every life you take in a meal, upon the field in battle, or cause to end by some other means, you waste value equal to yourself. No matter if you are king, peasant, wiseman, or fool. Under heaven, all men are equal. And thus, all men are brothers and peers.

Respect your enemies as you would respect your own kin, for no matter what enmity you hold for them or the cause, they are one and the same.

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Do not cling to life, or its joys, do not cling to life, or its sorrows. This is the wisdom I give to you. For your life will end, no matter what you do to prevent it or delay it death shall come to you someday. But that does not mean life is meaningless, all things must end, but that does not mean they never existed. Every action one takes, affects the future, changes the land, and inspires those who come after. All things must end, from the Dragon to the Toad, all creatures know death someday. But that does not mean they never lived. Do not flee from death, embrace the time you have, for one day you shall fade this is true, and one day all your works shall turn to dust, this is true. But, even if memory of you and all you created fade from this world, they will live on in the changes wrought by your actions and mere presence.

Do not fear death, do not hate death. All things are transient and will one day end, but they shall remain. A mountain may be ground to dust, but the field that stands where it once stood remains. A farmer may die in his field, but his children will tend it.

A warrior may die, but his final breath can change the course of nations.

Remember this, and know that while you will one day be forgotten, your actions no matter how small, shall shake the heavens themselves

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To give when one has plenty, is virtuous, to share when one has little, is virtuous. Both are acts of generosity, a virtue that wears many masks. To be generous, is to be virtuous. If your tree bears an extra fruit, share it, if one looks at your fruit hungrily, share it, if you have one fruit and a child has none, split it in half and share it. Generosity is one of the most virtuous acts a man can commit, but do not do so for the sake of being virtuous.

Do so because you can. A man who can be generous without thinking, is more virtuous than the man who chooses to be generous so he may be praised. Do not give so others admire you, give to give. If you have nothing to give, then do not give what little you have....

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...The stubborn mule came back for its master's child, but left its owner to drown. Cruelty has no reward, kindness has many. A man who is kind is rich even if he owns nothing, a child who is kind is a blessing from heaven. If you can be kind, be kind. Offer support, offer protection, offer shelter. Help the old farmer with his labor, be merry with the king who has lost his road in life.

To be kind costs nothing, takes nothing. To be cruel taxes the soul itself and costs you much. For a man who you were kind to, will return the favor, a man you have scorned shall return the favor.

Better the world, brighten it, be kind.

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Learn from others, ponder their actions, do not turn your head from the foreigner, but learn from him. Do not fear the unknown, but embrace it. Every meeting is a chance to gain understanding, and this grander wisdom than any text can give you. For the knowledge gained from knowing your fellow man, from mingling with them and learning from them, is a far greater gift than any other.

A farmer can teach a fisherman much, a blacksmith can tutor a soldier, a noble man has much to learn from his servants. Do not lock yourself away from the world, but wander freely and learn from your fellow man, instead of hating or fearing him

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...To improve one's self, no matter the method or reason, is an endless journey. Be it a journey for knowledge, for skill, for strength, for wealth, or for admiration, it does not matter. Self improvement, no matter how much work or labor is put towards it, is a journey with no end. You may approach perfection, but will never have it. Perfection is an impossible goal, but that does not mean you must not strive for it. Be happy with the steps you take towards it, even though you shall never reach the end of the road...

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We are born in the world, all men share the same cradle from birth to death. Do not abuse the world, do not wound it in search of glittering gems, do not poison its lakes, do not tear down its forests without reason.

Every creature upon the world is a member of our family. A blade of grass holds more value than any gem from the earth.

Nature is not an enemy, nor a resource, it is our mother, our father, our home. Treat it as such, care for it as such. For every tree you fell, plant two. Do not pollute water as you take it in a pail, do not scar the land to build a monument. Do not block the flow of the stream or river, take no more than you need to from nature, be it lumber, stone, grain or meat. For, like any form of life, nature itself may be poisoned, may be wounded. Care for it.

For if it prospers, those who live in it prosper as well, it shares its prosperity with all creatures, all men. As should you, prosperity, whatever form it takes, should be shared and spread as far as it can be stretched.

If your village has a clean well, and the village over the hill has a tainted one, carry water to them. If the village in the caves has no grain but yours does, bring it to them. So the village on the hill may bring its livestock to yours, and the people of the caves may repair your tools. Prosperity

spreads when it is shared and flows back to its source. It is not a pond of jade, but rather a every flowing river that courses through the lands.

And the duty of every man, is to protect this river, weather it flows from their own home, or from their neighbors, or the land itself.

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All men are free to make their own destiny, to follow their own paths. The Journey I write of, the road I suggest, and way I guide you down, is not one to be forced onto any man, nor is any other way of life. One is free to make their own choices, for better or for ill. No matter how benevolent a rule is, to force a single man under it, is a sin most grave and foul.

Any who would force another down the path they walk, or stop them from following the road they choose, should be opposed should be fought and battled if it comes to it. Oppressors, no matter the cause they follow, are a blight. Every man should stop oppression if he see it, slay the tyrant if they meet them. Should. One should not throw their life away or turn from the path they follow to do such, but should remember this lesson.

And remember, tyrants hold power because those beneath them do not band together, they hold power through fear and disunity.

Unity is a force, stronger than any army or ruler. No man can oppress a land that is truly banded together as one, no army can crush such a resistance. Remember this, Unity above all, is what gives power, the more unity a people as a whole nourish, the mightier they are.

Oppressors fear unity, for it topples them easily. Do not turn a blind eye because your brother follows a different life than yours, stand by him, and throw off his chains and challenge he who would oppress him

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One should be ever vigilant of their own thoughts, to ensure virtue and benevolences do not ferment into the poison of self-righteousness and ignorance.

The play within your mind shall be the example you shall use for this lesson. In it, a traveling monk thinks himself as somehow higher above those who have not fully devoted themselves to the Journey, but upon meditation, realizes he himself has strayed from its path.

The lesson is discussed at length so keen intellects may properly digest and absorb the knowledge deeper inside the teaching, and also presented within a fanciful story so children may also glean its meaning from a simple lesson.

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Humanity comes in many forms, and it walks many paths. But, know that the face of man, is not determined by outer appearance, but rather the quality of their character and spirit

There are many inspirations from your own experiences to draw upon for this teaching. From your students, to the Vishnu, to the Dai, even friends you have known for years. It will be easily understood, yet a revelation to the close and often fearful minds of the common folk. The outskirts of their villages, and the boundary of their farms, are often as far as they have dared to tread. It is imperative, that unity does not become a word for cooperation within a singular group but rather a collection of groups and peoples working as one.

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Suffering and pain are part of life, but do not seek to harm others as a means to vent these feelings. Instead, channel the negative impulses to positive and constructive ends

It would be easy for one so maligned and abused to turn their pain and suffering into hatred and spite to the world and those who had so harmed them. It will be taught, by your own experience with grief. Another monument to your lost friend, Small Chen, and many others who have fallen in battle or by tragedy. Perhaps it will soften the hearts of the Mao children who witnessed the hanging of their parents, or the vengeful Kang, in the years to come. But, that is truthfully a vague dream and hope. But, even a spark can grow into a fire, as it is said.

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Do not call a man your enemy, simply because he stands by those who oppose or seek to harm you. Virtue does not remain on a single side of a war or smaller conflict, it is present within both sides, in so manner or another

Enemy, a threat to an existence or belief, one who directly opposes the path you walk.

Foe, one you fight against, who may indirectly impede your path of life..

An Foe may become a friend or ally, an Enemy never could. An Example to be given, A fisherman is the Foe of the old farm cat, but an Enemy of his catch. A Brother of prospective wife who duels you for the right to marry his sister is a Foe, while the rival for her affections will be an enemy until the matter is settled. A man hired to guard a tyrant, is simply a foe, the tyrant himself is the enemy.

Three of many examples that will explain the new difference between these once synonyms. It will take time for this altering of Language to take hold, but it shall spread with as your Journey does and as literacy becomes more common place.

Lessons

"Destiny, the salve of fools, the only fate that is certain is death. All else must be earned or overcome. To believe otherwise is to be blind to reality"

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"Once, my eyes did see a most upsetting scene that did so befoul my gaze. A child and mother, crying over the father and husband, who beat them as if they were oxen pulling a cart. His death had come by my own hands, a punishment for the crimes he had committed upon his own kin, flesh and blood. Drink was the poison of his mind, and the beginning of his degeneration into little more than a beast. Yet his family, who had been so cruel towards and abused so viciously that they were on the brink of death when I found them, mourned him still"

"Such a sight, it made me ponder for some time, how could one mourn such a blackhearted brute, one that had nearly taken their own lives and filled them with suffering and torment alone, how could one shed tears for such a man."

"And then a revelation came to me! Like the fresh air of mourning! They did not mourn him as he was, but rather the man he had once been, before he ruined himself. Within every villain, there was once a man who could have become virtuous and wise, mourn them, do not praise the death of the criminal, mourn the man he could have been instead, this is the wisdom I give to you now"

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"To give when one has plenty, is virtuous. To share when one has little, is virtuous. Both are acts of generosity! A virtue that wears many masks. To be generous is to be virtuous. If your tree bears an extra fruit, share it, if one looks at your fruit hungrily, share it. If you have one fruit and a child has none, split it in half and share it. Generosity is one of the most virtuous acts a man can commit"

"But do not do so for the sake of being virtuous, do so because you can! A man who can be generous without thinking, is more virtuous than the man who choose to be generous so he may be praised! Do not give so others may admire you, give to give"

"If you have nothing to give, then do not give what little you have. For generosity, soon turns to madness! And open, offering hands, can lead as easily to ruin as they can lead to prosperity"

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"Uphold moderation! Any pleasure, even the simplest variety can turn to an expression of hedonism if one indulges upon it blindly!"

"However, it is not necessary not lock yourself away from all of the joys and pleasure of life. For happiness is a key component of humanity. Simply indulge moderately and wisely!"

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"One should be ever vigilant of their own thoughts. To ensure virtue and benevolences do not ferment into the poison of self-righteousness and ignorance. For even the best of intentions can

turn sour, even the kindest thoughts can be made wicked. Always remember how many before you have fallen to villainy because of their belief that they alone were righteous and wise."

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"Like all things, Nations and societies will eventually fade away and be forgotten. Whether they are replaced by their descendants or supplanted by invaders. Cultures change, shift and die like living things, and are thus transient by nature. Even if they claim the same name and profess their descentance from bygone people, their values will have changed throughout the passing of the ages"

"Thus, even civilization itself is temporary, for it will change hands between vastly different people even if it is not simply entirely forgotten as times change" You explain simply "Why, we may still call ourselves Yan, but we are different from the ourselves mere years prior! Such change can come swiftly or gradually. Though change should not be fear, much like stagnancy unrestrained change is to be avoided lest society is replaced by packs of mad men and lunatic trend setters!"

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"Though a contradiction to some passages found within ones journey, there are times that one must take up arms against others. Never should one revel in the blood of their enemies, as taking another's life has as much consequence as taking something from yourself."

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"All violence must serve a purpose. Those who seek violence for violence sake are insane, for violence exist solely to serve a greater purpose than to drown the world in blood. Thus one must remember their reason for fighting lest they cause pointless bloodshed and suffering."

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"To maintain a healthy mind, one must also maintain a healthy body. To expand one's knowledge without exercising the vessel to hold them, is the same mistake as to try to fill a cracked cup."

Dialogues

"What men are these "Tyrants", that if met, must be slain by the words of The Journey?"

"Men like Gao. Men who would force others to turn from the path they chose, or force them upon another against their own wishes. Men who would laugh at the idea of giving up his feasts so children may be fed, men who hunger for war for its own sake. Men who would wallow in their own degeneration no matter how their lifestyle poisons the lands they rule. The kind of man, who enjoys oppressing all those beneath him and refuses to change his ways"

"The man who only brings pain and suffering to the world, and takes everything good from it"

"That is the man I consider to be a Tyrant, the worst of tyrants to be specific. There are lesser breeds tyrants of course, but their crimes must be judged, they may live or die depending upon the weight and depth of their crimes. It is a hard term to explain, you would know a Tyrant when you meet one, unless you have blinded yourself to the reality of the world. The worst simply do not deserve to live. Others, may be allowed to live if they can change. Many must hang for the crimes they committed throughout their life"

"Unfortunately, few had the wisdom to repent. Tao Song was a tyrant, but he had virtues and loved his family, I gave him a last day with them and a quick death. Cui Fu was a monster, but he was loyal to the end, I gave him the battle he sought and honored him in death. Gao...was worse than either by several magnitudes. He had no virtue, no love, no loyalty to any but himself. And I still allowed him to indulge once more. I do not mourn Gao, I despise him. But I mourn Fu and Song, for the man he could have been and the father he was. That is the difference between the levels of Tyrant"

"So you can be virtuous and a tyrant?"

"The Yan king calls himself benevolent, as did Gao. It is the most effective mask to wear, some believe their own lies. If my word spreads, someday I fear, it will be twisted by another man to give himself pardon and reason for his tyranny and sinful ways"

"Why? Why would you do such a thing? We are your enemy"

"I only hate those who would do harm to others without just cause. Children and innocent mothers have done no such thing. You've heard my philosophy and listened to my words. All I wish, is for all men to be able to prosper and live their lives comfortably and in the manner they so choose. No needless excess, no decadence, no corruption. A virtuous society, where a man's kindness is not abused, but shared and repaid"

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"The Journey I have taught to many and encouraged to spread, only speaks of removing Tyrants, those who would abuse others and force them down paths that they do not wish to follow, those who would subjugate and oppress their brothers in life. So are all those of noble blood tyrants?"

"That is a vague description, easily exploited and expanded to include nearly any man in a position of power"

"It is quite clear, I went to great lengths describing the characteristics of a tyrant. So tell me, do the Yan want my head because they are Tyrants? Because they see a distorted image of me, or for some other reason? Why would they oppose wise rule, a rule that benefits the people and lands, but support a tyrant who wasted much potential wealth and talented men over petty grudges and his own pride"

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"That is a part of The Journey, is it not? To aid others when able to? To be generous without any reason besides that you are able to be. To seek to understand your fellow man and give unto them kindness"

"Yes, one of its many facets. It also reflects another teaching, one of the other four core tenants in fact. Nurturing the land, sharing and ensuring the spread of prosperity"

"And defending both, if those Journeymen who preach your word are to be believed. I've never before heard of men caring for nature, it is a queer but understandable thought. To respect the world we as civilized men stand apart from"

"If nature falls ill, so does civilization"

"I have never thought of it like that before, but your words ring true. But one thing that remains confusing to me, is your acceptance that all things shall fade and die one day, that life is transient"

"And thus knowing all life shares equal value, from the smallest creature to the mightiest king. What of the concept confuses you? I figured it was quite easily understood"

"No, I understand it, my words were vague forgive me, Lieren. I am simply confused as to how you and the students of The Journey can be so accepting of death, of the transience of life, and yet to not mourn it but rather revel in the fact that all things come to an end. It is a grim gospel to be sure, and one that the Yan have been trying to twist to reflect negatively upon your work"

"Well, why would one cling to life, when there is no method to make it endless? You live and you die. It is natural to die, to try and step from the cycle of life and death, is to height of foolishness. Men and all creatures large and small will come to an end one day, all works shall be forgotten someday, and all castles and civilizations shall turn to dust"

"But. That does not mean all you do has no point or worth. Even the smallest actions echo into the future, changing the world for good or ill. Even though one day all you have built and done shall turn to legend, and then myth and then be lost, even though all you know shall one day return to dust and ash, know that all you have done, from the greatest cruelty to the smallest kindness, has shaken the world and changed the course of history. The ripples of our actions, how we affect others, the changes we wrought rather by intent or purpose shall far outlast our own lives and even the very memory that we ever lived"

"So we simply do not fear death and the fading of memory, all things shall once be forgotten, but their presence and influence shall truly fade. It is one of the truths of the Journey, and how I myself of course view my own mortality. If life continues or simply ends does not concern me, if I shall see the changes I have brought through different eyes, does not bother me in the slightest. Simply that I have lived at all, and would have changed the world if I had simply remained a farmer, is enough for me to greet the fate that awaits me and all things peaceful"

"So you do not worship death, like Mao Bolin had claimed as he fled deeper into Yan with the rest of those cowards?"

"Not at all, we worship nothing, it's simply a school of thought, a teaching, a guide. Describing a Journey, and path of life. I do not hold it as gospel or divine revelation, it is merely a collection of thoughts, stories, beliefs and wisdom. Do they truly believe that I would tell anyone to praise death? All I say is to accept it, and not fear it"

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"Kill me, please kill me. You've taken everything from me, Giant, just kill me and be done with it. There is nothing left I hold onto in this world"

"Do not look at me with those judging eyes!. I've heard of the Journey you preach, Death is something to accept you say, don't you? You teach others not to fear death, as you slaughter any who you deem evil or name as tyrants"

"Would you go against your own words? to preserve a life that does not wish to continue, that has reached its end. I want to see Jian again, I want to be with Zihao, please, just kill me, there is nothing left for me in this life"

"Death is to be accepted, not desired. The words you speak come not from acceptance, but rather the venoms of depression and desperation. Caused by the pain of actions I had set into motion, so that I may bring joy and comforts to many other"

"In war, all men who wage it and march to its song suffer, often needlessly. Which is why I intend to end the war I've been forced to fight to a close as quickly as is possible. I am truly sorry of the pain I've caused you, but there was no other way, some men must die for their crimes in life, some will live to become ripe, ragged and old. It is a hard truth, but it is the truth and I shall not sweeten my words. I am sorry you've had to suffer, so others may flourish"

"Hypocrite"

"Perhaps. I will not claim to remain unsullied by my actions, or that these hands of my are untouched by blood, or my tongue free of hate and spite. All I can do is apologize for the wrongs I've committed upon you by proxy and offer a single, passing kindness"

"That life has so much left of offer you still, Suffering and hardship only serve to brighten the better days to follow. I will not act as if you have not lost much or haven't suffered terribly, but

even mortal wounds will heal with proper treatment. If one would only seek it. You could become as their legacy, speaking of their character and virtuous deeds, you could live for them and enjoy the simple life I'd offer you and your kin, You could become their memory, and write of their lives so they are remembered as more than villains in some fantastical play or account written by a man who knew them not, you could"

"I will die, by your hands or my own. What will they say of you, to leave a woman to throw herself from a cliff, or wade into a lake some night to drown?"

"I shall never force another from the path they choose to walk. If you will not look forward, to the fields of flowers and summer days to come, then I shall at least grant your wish to join your family without further pain"

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"Though I would remind Dandan, if she were awake now, that even the lives of our enemies retain their inherent value. And to find a hobby outside of unleashing destruction with the weapons she maintains and cares for. but such scolding can be carried out at a later date"

"Once again, The ideology you hold it astounds me, as it is so different from our own prior view of...war and life?"

"The Vishnu would have simply celebrated, if we could have achieved such a victory. But, as the Journey teaches, all life is equal and if I am to understand, the Yan...bring non warriors to the theater of war, as a...majority of their forces?"

"Men die in war, it is a harsh truth, but an unavoidable one, I took the path that would spare the most lives with certainty. As My brother Lieren has taught me to, he is, after all, much the same as a teacher or even father to me"

"He is to us all"

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"Feng, remember your limits, there is no shame in admitting when you are bested, some mountains cannot be scaled, some rivers may not be forded. It is simply the way of things, to be able to see when there is no chance of success or victory, is to be truly wise"

"Reign in my pride? I have learned this lesson already, Brother Lieren, but I shall engrave the teaching into my heart, as deeply as I am able to. I shall not make the same mistake I did at the Treachery"

"And remember, to blame oneself for the actions of another, is to be a fool."

"Liang, you have always been dutiful and stalwart, a loyal friend and ally. But I would remind you, that in a storm, it is the flexible reed that endures, while might and unmoving trees are broken and torn from the ground. If succeeding in the task I have given requires it, the command give unto you can become malleable and shifting"

"Look beyond the orders I am tasked with completing and seeing through, step from the rigid bridge, into the unknown water below. If such a need arises, of course. For once, my brother's insolent manner, will prove valuable"

"Dong, I know how well you work on your lonesome, akin to a panther on the prowl, but now you are given the command over other men. The responsibility of their lives, lies within your hands alone. It might be that you will be required to lead them into battle, it will be required that you ensure they are fed and well. Think of them like a Panther would her cubs, rather than as a hinderance or unwanted ally"

"I shall"

"Bai, oh how your blood craves the rush of battle and the thrill of the hunt. I know your failing well, you cannot change what brings you joy without great effort. However I would remind you, the cost of such eagerness. I will not scold and reprimand you for who you are, but, I would not wish to lose another of my friends so shortly after another, meditate on the Journey we both walk, and remember the tragedies of the past"

"I understand, Brother, my duty is to spy, not hunt. I will not come back as corpse, and fortune be good, neither will any of my men"

"I will hold you to that promise, my friend"

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"I consider Ling's fate to be one of the gravest mistakes I've made in my life, I have no love for Tyrants, even small ones like Ling. But torture, is a crime that I consider to be surmounted by only a handful of others in terms of sheer vileness"

"One of these crimes which surpasses it in wickedness, is slavery"

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"Cease! Your aggression, and halt thy threats, my friend and honored general. I understand, that this man and the master who would the leash to his collar, have committed a grave sin, and insult to these proud warriors"

"However, he has come into our fortress as a guest, even if he is the servant of a tyrant. He approached us with good manner and peaceful intent, even if him and his master stand against the virtues we believe and struggle to uphold, I will not see him butchered as an animal"

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"The Key to life is balance, to lose yourself in emotions or a single path is to become undone"

"Do not be afraid to learn from others, but know that there are some things that must remain unchanged"

"Know that every man is equal in worth, but to ignore each one's talent is to waste them!"

"Know that perfection is unreachable, but still strive to better yourself"

"Always be willing to fight for a good cause, but never do it for violence's sake. "

"Be willing to overthrow a tyrant, but understand the importance of order and society. "

"And above all, know that to love humanity, you must also love yourself"

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"Your words, made me feel ashamed I could not stand by those preachers you spoke of. That I never knew the names of such loyal students of the Journey I have walked, that I never was bequeathed the honor of meeting such virtuous souls. And the shame, the unforgiveable shame that I could not stand beside them and save them from their cruel fates"

"No more lives shall be lost to the hubris and hatred of the Yan, Not one more soul shall be given to the night for preaching acceptance and kindness. We shall end this atrocious, wrongful rule, and return the lands to benevolent leadership once more"

"The world that shall greet the coming dawn shall be free of the wiles of foxes and the corruption they encourage, for nothing is real, but what we create and what we create is reality"

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"Ah, strong wine and good company! How rare of a combination! To find another poet, who sings of clashing blades and biting steel in this strange valley of ice and snow. Oh this was truly a fortuitous encounter, to in my wanderings find a companion who could make sense of my somber ramblings! Rather than a beast who seeks my blood or an enemy with spear raised against my throat!"

"Ah, a skald are you. I've known a many skald in my short days, always they seem to find tragic ends, I can only hope you do not share the same destiny my friend"

"Hrrr, a fool's salve! Destiny is nothing but an excuse of the weak-willed and ambitious to excuse their failings or explain their cruelty! Fate is nothing but what our hands make! Reality is an unpainted canvas, waiting each living soul's artist brush"

"Ah, but we are all born with a destiny, great or small. While we can writ the saga of our lives, we can not change its beginning or end"

"Birth and death are their names, but while one cannot change their birth, they can decide the manner of their death"

"Truly you are wise, yet you are not blind like any seer I have yet met, and no prophecy is what it first appears to be. What difference is there if, at your birth, the stars aligned to speak of your death beneath great wings? And you struggle to avoid falling prey to giant eagles, only to die holding the banner of a king whose sigil is a hawk?"

"That is the nature of prophecies, if one looks for their signs, they will find them if they exist or not, and if any seer told me of my destiny, I'd piss on their faces. They are formless, and fit the agenda of the soothsayers who first spoke them. Destiny is a sham, fate is a Lie. One's death is

decided by one's own decisions and life, and it is not the end of their influence for you see, wolf man"

"For every action, from pissing on a seer's face to kicking a stone, ripples outwards and effects all existence, and the greatest ripple one can perform is in choosing the site and nature of their death! So as to alter the course of the river of the future's direction completely, and paint their legacy on the world, even if their names are forgotten within a single generation"

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"You condemn yourself to death, drinking so carelessly while living alone, hermit"

"All men must die, and all things must fade, stern face ogre of the mountain, perhaps I am already dead!"

"You're acting foolish. You are clearly alive"

"Is there much of a difference between life and death?"

"How rare it is to find another philosopher in the harsh expanse of this world, truly you must be strong to be able to think of such...ethereal ponderings"

"Oh, strength! That can be the topic of our clash of words and duel of beliefs, for clearly you are of the sort who knows what men must endure to survive in such harsh climes and those like you I have met before, have lacked the scholarly interest necessary to truly prove even an entertaining match in the arena of philosophy!"

"Strength and humanity. For many misunderstand strength, and I am curious what an man as bizarre as yourself will believe the definition of strength to be"

"What is strong"

"Oh I am going to enjoy this. Well, to answer that question, we must dissect the various forms of strength and determine if each is truly"

"Valid? How machine like. Can you truly define that which has so many forms and meanings? Can you describe the unseen wind, can you detail the passions of the heart, can you constrain the infinite expanse of all things with the word existence?"

"Well, brother of philosophy, who are you to say what can be shaped and what can be made to take form? Words, concepts, meaning, these are all assigned by human thought. But what we discuss is a universal truth, strength, and what it truly is, and what purpose it serves for the human race, for the strength I speak of is not the strength of beasts"

"Ohoho! A true challenger, my grandfather would kill for a chance to debate you, Iron hands. And that much was obvious, you speak of not the physical, substantial strength but the strength of will, of humanity itself no?"

"Using your intoxication as a shield then? To try and lure me into poorly wording my rebuttals? But yes, that is correct, I speak of the insubstantial, undefinable strength. The strength born through self-improvement, no matter what form it takes "

"You dare accuse me of such under hand tactics, stern faced one? No I would not dare to be so deceiving! And I too know the wisdom of self-improvement, but you must know that it has no end"

"It is still a worthwhile endeavor, for being better than you were is still preferable to languishing in weakness when strength could be reached by merely making an effort for it"

"Perfection is unattainable, its pursuit is still commendable, for self improvement is a righteous path and effort to make. And is a road without end, but that does not mean one should avoid walking it"

"Because an endless road provides bountiful opportunities and chances to refine and improve oneself, no matter the form of these refinements take"

"Or the method or reason. One should be content knowing they improve themselves with every step of this endless journey towards unreachable perfection"

"Knowing every step makes them strong"

"But what then, is the duty of the strong?"

Musings

But a lack of sin does not make a virtuous soul. While they do not indulge in needless excesses or hedonism, as the teaching of the Journey encourage denouncing such foolishness and moral degeneration, that is not enough to be truly virtuous by the definition you believe and teach with philosophy. While they are not consumed by base pleasure, they may not yet be virtuous according to your greatest work.

So, you intend to see if they have already began the Journey naturally. Such a happenstance would bolster the authenticity of your philosophy, if men naturally live lives that at least somewhat resemble the core tenets of The Journey you have started for so many others. It'd certainly lend an air of legitimacy to your teachings, however unlikely it'd be for these wild men to hold the same virtue that your Journey preaches by sheer coincidence. But still, you watch, closely and carefully, ignoring the fawning women and girls who have surrounded you and are now competing for attention none of them shall receive.

Are they kind, generous, and understanding? They certainly do not seem cruel to their kin, but have too little for you to know if they are generous. Understanding, can only be seen when they are exposed to other people or how their arguments and little scuffles amongst themselves play out. They also do not appear to abuse the land and its resources, judging from how they live, and none of them appear to be oppressed by the others.

But, it is probable that the weak are simply allowed to die in this society, for you only see strong and healthy members within this tribe. Which presents the question. Does that count as accepting the inevitable death and fading of all things? or is it the same breed of cruelty that men like Cui Fu held as gospel.

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You had moved according to the whims of your weeping heart, one moment imparting warnings of shedding blood for violence sake alone or seeking vengeance without just cause, another comparing a paranoid mind to a weed filled garden and the next creating a parable to teach the followers of your world view how to avoid the slimy grasp of the fetid lord of putrescence, Na gou, then the importance of physical health and exercise . You vaguely realized the unifying subject of

what may be the last addition to your Journey but as soon as you did, you realized you had set aside the pages bearing the incomplete lessons, tenants and teachings and had begun to instead pen poem after poem.