GUIDE · CONFUCIANISM

A guide for people of the Confucian tradition.

The Analects do not present life as a test set by a higher intelligence, and Confucius spoke of Heaven (Tian) sparingly; whether Heaven is personal or a moral order is a long-standing question within the tradition. Still, the Analects hold that Heaven knows a person who goes unrecognized, that offending Heaven has no remedy, and that reciprocity is a rule for all of life, including toward those outside one's family. Many Confucians would see in this a call to cultivate character where no one is keeping score.



In your own tradition

> "Is not RECIPROCITY such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

ANALECTS XV.23 (LEGGE NUMBERING: BOOK XV, CHAP. XXIII) · JAMES LEGGE, THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS (THE CHINESE CLASSICS), 1893 · READ IT IN CONTEXT

> "Let the superior man never fail reverentially to order his own conduct, and let him be respectful to others and observant of propriety:-- then all within the four seas will be his brothers."

ANALECTS XII.5, SECTION 4 (SPOKEN BY ZIXIA, A DISCIPLE OF CONFUCIUS) · JAMES LEGGE, THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS (THE CHINESE CLASSICS), 1893 · READ IT IN CONTEXT

> "I do not murmur against Heaven. I do not grumble against men. My studies lie low, and my penetration rises high. But there is Heaven;-- that knows me!"

ANALECTS XIV.37, SECTION 2 · JAMES LEGGE, THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS (THE CHINESE CLASSICS), 1893 · READ IT IN CONTEXT

> "He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray."

ANALECTS III.13, SECTION 2 · JAMES LEGGE, THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS (THE CHINESE CLASSICS), 1893 · READ IT IN CONTEXT

Five things to do this week

- [ ] **Ask what you would want**
  Before dealing with a stranger, practice shu: ask what you would want done to you in their place, then do that.

- [ ] **Be a junzi when unobserved**
  Choose one small matter no one will check, such as returning something extra or keeping a rule, and do it rightly.

- [ ] **Treat strangers as brothers**
  Following Analects 12.5, greet and help one stranger this week with the courtesy you would show kin.

- [ ] **Let credit go unclaimed**
  Do good work and let it pass without mention. Analects 1.1 asks whether one is not complete in virtue who is not troubled at going unnoticed.

- [ ] **Examine yourself daily**
  Like Zengzi in Analects 1.4, review your day on a few points, such as whether you were faithful to others and kept your word.

Questions to bring to your own teacher

- How does our teacher understand Tian today, as a personal observer, a moral order, or both?
- How should the Analects' reciprocity be applied to strangers, when so much Confucian teaching begins with family and graded relationships?
- What does it mean to act as a junzi when no one is watching, and what practices in our community support that?

What this guide is not claiming. Confucian thinkers differ on whether Heaven is a personal will or an impersonal moral order, and on how far care extends beyond family and community. This guide does not claim Confucianism teaches that life is a test, only that the Analects hold related ideas. I am not a scholar of your tradition, and no tradition or its leaders have endorsed this site. Ask your own teachers and community what these passages mean to them.

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