

論語淺釋 (續)

The Analects of Confucius (continued)

宣化上人講

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DHARMA TALK DHARMA RAIN | 法語法雨

【八佾第三】

【上人講解】

「王孫賈」：是和魯國鄰國的衛國，一個做官的，「問曰」：他就問孔子說，「與其媚於奧，寧媚於灶」：奧，是房間西南角最尊貴的公祀地，就是供奉神或者祖先之類的。媚，就是諂媚，就是不太合理，做得不光明磊落，好像行賄賂似的。灶，就是每個家庭裡的灶君，我們北方叫祂「灶君老爺」，就是管廚房的，在那個地方看誰偷東西吃，就報告玉皇大帝。

所以中國有這麼一個風俗，十二月二十三這一天叫「過小年」，就是送灶君。什麼叫送灶君呢？通常中國人在家裡的神龕都供奉有灶君的像。過小年的時候，就把舊的灶君像撕下來，用火燒了它，又用個什麼東西插上一匹馬，說灶君騎著馬去見玉皇大帝。去見玉皇大帝，就用點糖把祂嘴黏上，這個糖叫「灶糖」，是用黏米做的，也很甜的，就叫祂上天到玉皇大帝那兒，不要講那麼多話。所以又說：「上天言好事，下界降吉祥。」就是說：「灶君！你若上天，你要撿好聽的說；你到人間來，你又要給人間吉祥。」這可以說是中國一種不太正確的風俗。

有人就問，人間離天上究竟有多遠？這人就答覆說大約三百多里路。這個灶君老爺騎著馬，一天跑一百里路；祂一去跑

Chapter 3: Eight Rows of Eight Dancers

[Venerable Master's Explanation]

Wang Sunjia was an official in the State of Wei, which was located next to the State of Lu. Inquired. He posed this question to Confucius: "There is a saying: Rather than fawning on the resident spirit in the southwest corner, it is better to please the kitchen god instead." '奧' (ào) refers to the southwest corner of a house, the most honored location for the family to worship spirits or ancestors. '媚' (mèi) means 'to fawn on' or 'curry favor with.' Such an act is not in accord with principle because it is a form of bribery that is carried out in a furtive way. '灶' (zào) refers to the kitchen god present in every household. We northerners call him 'Lord of the Stove.' He is the deity in charge of the kitchen, looking out for people who steal food to eat and reporting them to the Jade Emperor.

For this reason, there is a custom in China called 'celebrating the little New Year,' which occurs on the twenty-third day of the twelfth lunar month. The purpose of this event is to send the kitchen god off. What does this mean? Generally, Chinese households have a shrine for worshipping the kitchen god's image. When 'celebrating the little New Year,' the old image of the kitchen god is taken down and burnt. Another implement is used to poke something that resembles a horse, meaning that the kitchen god has set off on a horse for an audience with the Jade Emperor in heaven. In order to prevent him from reporting too many details to the Jade Emperor, stove honey, a sweet sticky substance made of glutinous rice, is smeared onto the image's mouth. Hence, the saying: Ascending to heaven, speak only of good things; descending to the worldly realm, bestow good fortune. This is to say: "Kitchen God! When you ascend to the heavens, mention only the favorable things. When you return to the human realm, you must bestow blessings and auspiciousness on mankind." It can be said that this Chinese custom is not particularly desirable.

了三天，休息半天，辦了半天事，就又回來了，回來又跑了三天。因為二十三到初一，這是來回七天的時間，所以就說大約三百多里路。那麼究竟怎麼樣？這是人間一些個愚夫愚婦這麼樣亂講亂講。我告訴你們中國這個 story（故事），但你們不要相信這個！

王孫賈的意思，灶神就譬如他自己；奧這個尊位所供的神，就譬如國家的領袖。國家的領袖雖然有地位，可是他不太管事的；這個灶君，正所謂「縣官不如現管」，他很有權力的。所以意思就是，你想要做什麼事，先要通過我這個門口，你才可以得到成功；你不通過我這門口，你什麼事不容易成功，不容易做到的。

這就是給孔子一個題目，叫他明白知道哪一邊是重要，哪一邊是不重要的。所以他就說你想去禮拜求禱奧所供的神，就莫如求這個灶神。這個灶神祂是一個當權者，祂是管事情管得多的一個。也就是給孔子暗示：「你若是想到我這個國家來做什麼事，就先要在這兒做一點功夫，也就是要對我有點好處，有點利益，你才能成功。如果你不來我這兒，你就沒有利益，那你什麼也辦不到的。」就是預先提醒孔子，他怕孔子不知道，不會這麼做。

「何謂也」：這是怎麼回事？他假裝他不明白，就問孔子說：「這是怎麼回事啊？」他想孔子是聖人，是當時一個學者，一定懂這個意思，那麼就會對他好了。

「子曰：不然」：可是孔子不買他的帳，而且還說不是這樣子！「獲罪於天，無所禱也」：你若是得罪天了，你就沒有地方可以去求的。你到奧那兒求神也不行，到灶神那兒求也是不行的。這意思是要他往正了做。往正了做，我誰也不需要求的，我不需要拍哪一個人的馬屁。媚，也就是拍馬屁，在那兒溜虛捧盛，在那兒盡給人戴高帽子這一類的。✻

Someone once asked, "How far away are the heavens from the human realm?" Another person replied, "About three hundred *li* (Chinese miles)." Riding on his horse, the Lord of the Stove can travel a distance of one hundred *li* in one day. Therefore, the entire journey to heaven takes three days. After resting for half a day, he spends another half day attending to matters. On his return trip to the human world, he takes another three days. As there is a period of seven days between the twenty-third to the first day of the Lunar New Year, that person conveniently asserts that the distance is about three hundred *li*. Ha! To go the heavens! How is it exactly? All this is just nonsensical talk spouted by foolish men and women. I am just relating a Chinese story to you, but you shouldn't believe a word of it!

Wang Sunjia was giving a hint by drawing an analogy between himself and the kitchen god, while likening the spirit being worshipped in the respected southwest corner of the house to the head of state. Although the leader of the country occupies a high position, he doesn't play a very active role in managing state affairs. On the contrary, the kitchen god is very powerful because, as the saying goes: "Rather than seeing the county magistrate (縣官 *xiàn guān*), one might as well speak with his chief steward (現管 *xiàn guǎn*)." The implication is that whatever matter you wish to do, you must first go through me before you can succeed. If you were to bypass me, then you'll find it very difficult to accomplish anything.

His intention was to give Confucius something to ponder about: "You should know which side is important and which is not. If you are thinking of getting acquainted with the resident spirit, you might as well get to know the kitchen god instead. You are better off seeking help from the latter than paying your respects to the former. The kitchen god is the one holding the reins of power and is overall in charge." This was a hint to Confucius: "If you want to come to my state to do anything, you must first apply some effort where I am concerned. In other words, it is only when I can gain some advantages or benefits that you are able to succeed. If you bypass me, it will do you no good at all and you won't be able to get anything done." He forewarned Confucius just in case he was not aware of the usual practice.

"What is the meaning of this?" On the pretense of not understanding this saying, he asked Confucius, "What is it all about?" Since Confucius was a sagely person and also a scholarly person of that time, he would definitely know the underlying meaning and treat him favorably.

The Master replied, "That is incorrect!" However, Confucius disagreed and, instead, retorted, "No! That is not the way!" If one offends the heavens, there is none to whom one can beseech with prayers. If you create offenses against heaven, there is no place where you can turn to for help, whether it is the resident spirit in the southwest corner of the house or the kitchen god. Confucius' view was that one should be an upright person: "As long as I conduct myself in an upright manner, I do not have to seek help from others or curry favor with anyone." '媚' (*mèi*) means to ingratiate oneself with somebody, putting tall hats on that person. ✻