James L. Zainaldin
Grief and mourning in a global world: cross-cultural reflections
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Consolation in Question: Philosophical Perspectives on Grief between Greece, Rome, and China

Translations

1. Priam's grief (Homer, *Iliad* 24) (tr. Lattimore)

He spoke, and storm-footed Iris swept away with the message
and came to the house of Priam. There she found outcry and mourning.
The sons sitting around their father inside the courtyard
made their clothes sodden with their tears, and among them the old man
sat veiled, beaten into his mantle. Dung lay thick
on the head and neck of the aged man, for he had been rolling
in it, he had gathered and smeared it on with his hands. And his daughters
all up and down the house and the wives of his sons were mourning
as they remembered all those men in their numbers and valour
who lay dead, their lives perished at the hands of the Argives.

(Priam to Achilles)
"Give me, beloved of Zeus, a place to sleep presently, so that
we may even go to bed and take the pleasure of sweet sleep.
For my eyes have not closed underneath my lids since that time
when my son lost his life beneath your hands, but always
I have been grieving and brooding over my numberless sorrows
and wallowed in the muck about my courtyard's enclosure.
Now I have tasted food again and have let the gleaming
wine go down my throat. Before, I had tasted nothing."

2. Epic consolation (Homer, *Iliad* 24) (tr. Lattimore)

. . . 'Ah, unlucky,
surely you have had much evil to endure in your spirit.
How could you dare to come alone to the ships of the Achaians
and before my eyes, when I am one who have killed in such numbers
such brave sons of yours? The heart in you is iron. Come, then,
and sit down upon this chair, and you and I will even let
our sorrows lie still in the heart for all our grieving. There is not
any advantage to be won from grim lamentation.
Such is the way the gods spun life for unfortunate mortals,
that we live in unhappiness, but the gods themselves have no sorrows.
There are two urns that stand on the door-sill of Zeus. They are unlike
for the gifts they bestow: an urn of evils, an urn of blessings.
If Zeus who delights in thunder mingles these and bestows them
on man, he shifts, and moves now in evil, again in good fortune.
But when Zeus bestows from the urn of sorrows, he makes a failure
of man, and the evil hunger drives him over the shining

earth, and he wanders respected neither of gods nor mortals.
Such were the shining gifts given by the gods to Peleus
from his birth, who outshone all men beside for his riches
and pride of possession, and was lord over the Myrmidons. Thereto
the gods bestowed an immortal wife on him, who was mortal.
But even on him the god piled evil also. There was not
any generation of strong sons born to him in his great house
but a single all-untimely child he had, and I give him
no care as he grows old, since far from the land of my fathers
I sit here in Troy, and bring nothing but sorrow to you and your children.
And you, old sir, we are told you prospered once; for as much
as Lesbos, Makar's hold, confines to the north above it
and Phrygia from the north confines, and enormous Hellespont,
of these, old sir, you were lord once in your wealth and your children.
But now the Uranian gods brought us, an affliction upon you,
forever there is fighting about your city, and men killed.
But bear up, nor mourn endlessly in your heart, for there is not
anything to be gained from grief for your son; you will never
bring him back; sooner you must go through yet another sorrow.'

3. The Socratic dilemma (Plato, *Apology* 40c4–41c7) (tr. Grube)

Let us reflect in this way, too, that there is good hope that death is a blessing, for it is one of two things: either the dead are nothing and have no perception of anything, or it is, as we are told, a change and a relocating for the soul from here to another place. If it is complete lack of perception, like a dreamless sleep, then death would be a great advantage. For I think that if one had to pick out that night during which a man slept soundly and did not dream, put beside it the other nights and days of his life, and then see how many days and nights had been better and more pleasant than that night, not only a private person but the great king would find them easy to count compared with the other days and nights. If death is like this I say it is an advantage, for all eternity would then seem to be no more than a single night. If, on the other hand, death is a change from here to another place, and what we are told is true and all who have died are there, what greater blessing could there be, gentlemen of the jury? If anyone arriving in Hades will have escaped from those who call themselves jurymen here, and will find those true jurymen who are said to sit in judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthus and Aeacus and Triptolemus and the other demi-gods who have been upright in their own life, would that be a poor kind of change? Again, what would one of you give to keep company with Orpheus and Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer? I am willing to die many times if that is true. It would be a wonderful way for me to spend my time whenever I met Palamedes and Ajax, the son of Telamon, and any other of the men of old who died through an unjust conviction, to compare my experience with theirs. I think it would be pleasant. Most important, I could spend my time testing and examining people there, as I do here, as to who among them is wise, and who thinks he is, but is not.

4. Expurgating grief (Plato, Republic III 387d1–388d7) (tr. Grube, rev. Reeve)

> Must we also delete the lamentations and pitiful speeches of famous men?
> We must, if indeed what we said before is compelling.

Consider though whether we are right to delete them or not. We surely say that a decent man doesn't think that death is a terrible thing for someone decent to suffer—even for someone who happens to be his friend.

We do say that.

Then he won't mourn for him as for someone who has suffered a terrible fate.

Certainly not.

We also say that a decent person is most self-sufficient in living well and, above all others, has the least need of anyone else.

That's true.

Then it's less dreadful for him than for anyone else to be deprived of his son, brother, possessions, or any other such things.

Much less.

Then he'll least give way to lamentations and bear misfortune most quietly when it strikes.

Certainly.

We'd be right, then, to delete the lamentations of famous men, leaving them to women (and not even to good women, either) and to cowardly men, so that those we say we are training to guard our city will disdain to act like that.

That's right.

Again, then, we'll ask Homer and the other poets not to represent Achilles, the son of a goddess, as

> Lying now on his side, now on his back, now again
> On his belly; then standing up to wander distracted
> This way and that on the shore of the unharvested sea.

Nor to make him pick up ashes in both hands and pour them over his head, weeping and lamenting in the ways he does in Homer. Nor to represent Priam, a close descendant of the gods, as entreating his men and

> Rolling around in dung,
> Calling upon each man by name.

And we'll ask them even more earnestly not to make the gods lament and say:

> Alas, unfortunate that I am, wretched mother of a great son.

But, if they do make the gods do such things, at least they mustn't dare to represent the greatest of the gods as behaving in so unlikely a fashion as to say:

> Alas, with my own eyes I see a man who is most dear to me
> Chased around the city, and my heart laments

or

> Woe is me, that Sarpedon, who is most dear to me, should be
> Fated to be killed by Patroclus, the son of Menoetius . . .

If our young people, Adeimantus, listen to these stories without ridiculing them as not worth hearing, it's hardly likely that they'll consider the things described in them to be unworthy of mere human beings like themselves or that they'll rebuke themselves for doing or saying similar things when misfortune strikes. Instead, they'll feel neither shame nor restraint but groan and lament at even insignificant misfortunes.

5. Conquering grief (Plato, *Republic* X 603e2–604d10) (tr. Grube, rev. Reeve)

We also mentioned somewhere before that, if a decent man happens to lose his son or some other prized possession, he'll bear it more easily than the other sorts of people.

Certainly.

But now let's consider this. Will he not grieve at all, or, if that's impossible, will he be somehow measured in his response to pain?

The latter is closer to the truth.

Now, tell me this about him: Will he fight his pain and put up more resistance to it when his equals can see him or when he's alone by himself in solitude?

He'll fight it far more when he's being seen.

But when he's alone I suppose he'll venture to say and do lots of things that he'd be ashamed to be heard saying or seen doing.

That's right.

And isn't it reason and law that tells him to resist his pain, while his experience of it tells him to give in?

True.

And when there are two opposite inclinations in a person in relation to the same thing at the same time, we say that he must also have two parts.

Of course.

Isn't one part ready to obey the law wherever it leads him?

How so?

The law says, doesn't it, that it is best to keep as quiet as possible in misfortunes and not get excited about them? First, it isn't clear whether such things will turn out to be good or bad in the end; second, it doesn't make the future any better to take them hard; third, human affairs aren't worth taking very seriously; and, finally, grief prevents the very thing we most need in such circumstances from coming into play as quickly as possible.

What are you referring to?

Deliberation. We must accept what has happened as we would the fall of the dice, and then arrange our affairs in whatever way reason determines to be best. We mustn't hug the hurt part and spend our time weeping and wailing like children when they trip. Instead, we should always accustom our souls to turn as quickly as possible to healing the disease and putting the disaster right, replacing lamentation with cure.

That would be the best way to deal with misfortune, at any rate.

Accordingly, we say that it is the best part of us that is willing to follow this rational calculation.

Clearly.

Then won't we also say that the part that leads us to dwell on our misfortunes and to lamentation, and that can never get enough of these things, is irrational, idle, and a friend of cowardice?

6. Cicero defines distress (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.25) (tr. Graver)

3.25 . . . distress is a belief that a serious evil is present. Specifically, it is a fresh belief, and the evil is of such a nature that it seems right to be pained by it—seems so, at least, to the person who is suffering and who believes that it is appropriate for him to suffer.

7. Cicero on the need to eradicate distress (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3–4) (tr. Graver)

3.27 Now, do you think this could possibly happen to the wise person, to be subject to distress in this way? That is, to misery. For every emotion is a misery, but distress is a very torture-chamber. Desire scalds us; wild delight makes us giddy; fear degrades us; but the effects of

distress are worse: gauntness, pain, depression, disfigurement. It eats away at the mind and, in a word, destroys it. This we must shed; this we must cast away, or else remain in misery.

3.82 Distress of any kind is far removed from the wise person, because it is an empty thing; because it serves no purpose; because it has its origin not in nature, but in judgment and opinion and in a kind of invitation that is issued when we decide that grief is appropriate.

4.60 But the specific and more reliable cure is when you teach that the emotions are wrong in and of themselves and have nothing either natural or necessary about them.

8. Epicurus on grief (Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines* 40) (tr. Inwood and Gerson)

All those who had the power to acquire the greatest confidence from [sc. the threats posed by] their neighbours also thereby lived together most pleasantly with the surest guarantee; and since they enjoyed the fullest sense of belonging they did not grieve the early death of the departed, as though it called for pity.

9. Crantor on grief (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3; [Plutarch], *Consolation to Apollonius*)

Cic. *Tusc*. 3.12 (tr. Graver) It's very human to think that way. After all, people are not made of stone; it's natural that there should be some soft and tender element in our minds, something that would be shaken by distress as by a storm. There is some sense in what Crantor says (he was one of the most eminent members of the Academy, to which I adhere): "I cannot by any means agree with those who extol some kind of impassivity. Such a thing is neither possible nor beneficial. I do not wish to be ill, but if I am, and if some part of my body is to be cut open or even amputated, let me feel it. This absence of pain comes at a high price: it means being numb in body, and in mind scarcely human."

[Plut.] *Ad Apoll.* 102c6–e1 (tr. Babbitt) The pain and pang felt at the death of a son has in itself good cause to awaken grief, which is only natural, and over it we have no control. For I, for my part, cannot concur with those who extol that harsh and callous indifference, which is both impossible and unprofitable. For this will rob us of the kindly feeling which comes from mutual affection and which above all else we must conserve. But to be carried beyond all bounds and to help in exaggerating our griefs I say is contrary to nature, and results from our depraved ideas. Therefore this also must be dismissed as injurious and depraved and most unbecoming to right-minded men, but a moderate indulgence is not to be disapproved. "Pray that we be not ill," says Crantor of the Academy, "but if we be ill, pray that sensation be left us, whether one of our members be cut off or torn out. For this insensibility to pain is attained by man only at a great price; for in the former case, we may suppose, it is the body which has been brutalized into such insensibility, but in the latter case the soul."

10. Peripatetic moderation in grief (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4; pseudo-Archytas *apud* Stobaeus, *Selections*

Cic. *Tusc*. 4.38 (tr. Graver) For this reason we must regard as feeble and unmanly the position of the Peripatetics, who say it is necessary that our minds should experience emotion but set what they call a "limit" beyond which one should not proceed.

Stob. 3.1.106 (tr. Sharples) So let them not dare to say that man is free from disease and pain, or be confident in saying that he is free from grief. For as we leave some pains for the body, so [sc. we leave some] pains at [sc. these] for the soul. However, the griefs of the foolish are irrational; those of the wise extend as far as reason allows in defining things. Indeed their [sc. the Stoics'] boast of *apatheia* removes the nobility of virtue, if it withstands death and pain and poverty when these are indifferents and not evils. For things that are not evil are easy to overcome. So one must practise approaching *metriopatheia*, so that we may avoid insensibility to pain as much as what is emotional, and not say things which go beyond our [sc. human] nature.

11. An Epicurean alternative? (Plutarch, *That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible* 1101a–1101b4) (tr. Einarson and De Lacy)

But if we are to add anything to what has already been said, I think I will first take from them the following point. They [sc. the Epicureans] disagree with those who would do away with grief and tears and lamentation at the death of friends, and say that an absence of grief that renders us totally insensible stems from another greater evil: hardness or a passion for notoriety so inordinate as to be insane. Hence they say that it is better to be moved somewhat and to grieve and to melt into tears and so with all the maudlin sentiment they feel and put on paper, getting themselves the name of being soft-hearted and affectionate characters. For this is what Epicurus has said not only in many other passages, but in his letter on the death of Hegesianax to Dositheus the father and Pyrson the brother of the deceased.

12. Key works in the Greco-Roman consolatory tradition

(a) In the philosophical tradition

Crantor of Soli, *On Grief* (Περὶ πένθους) [lost]
Pseudo-Plato, *Axiochus*
Cicero, *Consolatio* (*ad se*) [cf. *Tusculan Disputations* 3–4]
Seneca, *Consolation to Marcia* + *Consolatio to Polybius*
Seneca, *Moral Letters* 63, 99
Plutarch, *Consolation to his Wife*
Pseudo-Plutarch, *Consolation to Apollonius*
Jerome, *Letter* 60
Ambrose, *On the Death of Satyrus*

(b) 'Non-philosophical,' popular/conventional, and rhetorical

Sulpicius to Cicero (*Ad fam.* 4.5)
Cicero to Titius (*Ad fam* 5.16)
Pliny, *Letter* 5.16
Funerary inscriptions (some epigrammatic)
Funeral orations (not all)
Pseudo-Dionysius, *Rhetoric* 6.5 (ὁ λόγος εἰς παραμυθίαν)
Menander Rhetor, *On Epideictic Speeches* Spengel 413.6–414.30 (παραμυθητικὸς λόγος), 418–422 (ἐπιτάφιος λόγος)

(c) Poetic material

Pseudo-Ovid, *Consolatio ad Liuiam* sive *Epicedion Drusi*
Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 1.3 (on exile)
Statius, *Siluae* 2.1, 2.6, 3.3, 5.1, 5.3, 5.5
Miscellaneous epigrammatic and elegiac poetry

(d) In the philosophical tradition on exile

Musonius Rufus, *Discourses* 9
Seneca, *Consolation to Helvia*
Plutarch, *On Exile*

13. Mourning rituals (*Yili* 儀禮, *Ceremonies and Rites*) (tr. Steele)

From cf. *Ji xi li*: The chief mourner lives in a lean-to shed. He sleeps on straw and pillows his head on a clod. He does not put off fillet or girdle when he sleeps. He wails day and night whenever he thinks on his sorrow. He does not speak except about the obsequies. He sups congee, made night and morning, with one handful of rice. He does not accompany this with either vegetables or fruit.

14. The moral and ethical import of mourning (*Liji* 禮記, *Record of Rites*) (tr. Legge)

From ch. *Wang zhi* The six ceremonial observances were: capping; marrying; mourning rites; sacrifices; feasts; and interviews. The seven lessons [sc. of morality] were: [sc. the duties between] father and son; elder brother and younger; husband and wife; ruler and minister; old and young; friend and friend; host and guest. The eight objects of government were: food and drink; clothes; business [sc. or, the profession]; maintenance of distinctions; measures of length; measures of capacity; and definitely assigned rules.

From ch. *Li qi*: In the sacrifice to God in the suburb, we have the utmost expression of reverence. In the sacrifices of the ancestral temple, we have the utmost expression of humanity. In the rites of mourning, we have the utmost expression of leal-heartedness. In the preparation of the robes and vessels for the dead, we have the utmost expression of affection. In the use of gifts and offerings between host and guest, we have the utmost expression of what is right. Therefore when the superior man would see the ways of humanity and righteousness, he finds them rooted in these ceremonial usages.

From ch. *Yue ji*: Therefore the ancient kings, when they instituted their ceremonies and music, regulated them by consideration of the requirements of humanity. By the sackcloth worn for parents, the wailings, and the weepings, they defined the terms of the mourning rites. [. . .] Ceremonies afforded the defined expression for the [sc. affections of the] people's minds; music secured the harmonious utterance of their voices; the laws of government were designed to promote the performance (of the ceremonies and music); and punishments, to guard against the violation of them. When ceremonies, music, laws, and punishments had everywhere full course, without irregularity or collision, the method of kingly rule was complete.

From ch. *Ji tong*: It is by sacrifice that the nourishment of parents is followed up and filial duty

to them Perpetuated. The filial heart is a storehouse [sc. of all filial duties]. Compliance with everything that can mark his course, and be no violation of the relation [sc. between parent and child]—the keeping of this is why we call it a storehouse. Therefore in three ways is a filial son's service of his parents shown—while they are alive, by nourishing them; when they are dead, by all the rites of mourning; and when the mourning is over by sacrificing to them. In his nourishing them we see his natural obedience; in his funeral rites we see his sorrow; in his sacrifices we see his reverence and observance of the [sc. proper] seasons. In these three ways we see the practice of a filial son.

15. Filial grief (*Liji* 禮記, *Record of Rites*) (tr. Legge)

From ch. *Tan gong* I: When [sc. a father] has just died, [sc. the son] should appear quite overcome, and as if he were at his wits' end; when the corpse has been put into the coffin, he should cast quick and sorrowful glances around, as if he were seeking for something and could not find it; when the interment has taken place, he should look alarmed and restless, as if he were looking for some one who does not arrive; at the end of the first year's mourning, he should look sad and disappointed; and at the end of the second year's, he should have a vague and unreliant look.

From ch. *Tan gong* I: When Gao Zi-gao was engaged with the mourning for his parents, his tears flowed [sc. silently] like blood for three years, and he never [sc. laughed] so as to show his teeth. Superior men considered that he did a difficult thing.

From ch. *Za ji* II: The mourning for parents is taken away [sc. at the end of three years], [sc. but only] its external symbols; the mourning for brothers [sc. at the end of one year], [sc. and also] internally.

From ch. *Za ji* II: After a man has put off the mourning [sc. for his father], if, when walking along the road, he sees one like [sc. his father], his eyes look startled. If he hear one with the same name, his heart is agitated. In condoling with mourners on occasion of a death, and inquiring for one who is ill, there will be something in his face and distressed manner different from other men. He who is thus affected is fit to wear "the three years" mourning. So far as other mourning is concerned, he may walk right on [sc. without anything] having such an effect on him.

From ch. *Ji yi*: Thus the filial piety taught by the ancient kings required that the eyes of the son should not forget the looks [sc. of his parents], nor his ears their voices; and that he should retain the memory of their aims, likings, and wishes. As he gave full play to his love, they seemed to live again; and to his reverence, they seemed to stand out before him. So seeming to live and stand out, so unforgotten by him, how could his sacrifices be without the accompaniment of reverence?

16. Confucius on mourning (*Lunyu* 論語, *Analects*) (tr. Watson)

From ch. *Ba yi* [3.4] Lin Fang asked what is basic in ritual. The Master said, "A big question indeed! In rites in general, rather than extravagance, better frugality. In funeral rites, rather than thoroughness, better real grief."

Cf. *Liji*, ch. *Tan gong* I (tr. Legge) Zi-lu said, “I heard the Master say that in the rites of mourning, exceeding grief with deficient rites is better than little demonstration of grief with superabounding rites; and that in those of sacrifice, exceeding reverence with deficient rites is better than an excess of rites with but little reverence.”

From ch. *Yang huo* [17.21] Zai Wo asked about the three-year mourning period, saying that one year should be long enough. “If the gentleman goes three years without performing rituals, the rituals are certain to decline; if he goes three years without performing music, music is certain to be lost. The old grain has been used up; the new grain has ripened; drills have kindled new fires to replace the old ones—surely one year is long enough!”

The Master said, “Eating rice, wearing brocade—would you feel right doing that?”

“Yes, I would,” said Zai Wo.

“If you would feel right, then do so. But when a gentleman is in mourning, if he ate fine food, it would have no savor; if he listened to music, it would bring no joy; if he lived in ease, it would not feel right. Therefore, he does not do so. But now you would feel right, so you may do so.”

After Zai Wo had left, the Master said, “Yu (Zai Wo) has no humaneness! Only after a child is three years old does he leave the bosom of his father and mother. The three-year mourning period is a custom common to everyone in the world. Surely Yu, too, enjoyed his three years of loving from father and mother!”

From ch. *Zi zhang* [19.17] Master Zeng said, “I have heard our Master say, ‘People never fully express what is in them. If one had to cite an exception, it would be when they are mourning a parent.’”

17. Mencius on mourning (*Mengzi* 孟子) (tr. Van Norden)

From ch. *Li lou* II [4b13] Mengzi said,“Caring for the living is not sufficient to be considered a great task. Only sending off the dead may be considered a great task.”

From ch. *Teng wen gong* I [3a5] Xu Bi told Mengzi this. Mengzi said, “ . . . Now, in past ages, there were those who did not bury their parents. When their parents died, they took them and abandoned them in a gulley. The next day they passed by them, and foxes were eating them, bugs were sucking on them. Sweat broke out on the survivors’ foreheads. They turned away and did not look. It was not for the sake of others that they sweated. What was inside their hearts broke through to their countenances. So they went home and, returning with baskets and shovels, covered them. If covering them was really right, then the manner in which filial children and benevolent people cover their parents must also be part of the Way.”

From ch. *Jin xin* I [7a39] King Xuan of Qi wanted to shorten the period of mourning. Mengzi’s disciple Gongsun Chou asked,“Isn’t mourning for a year better than stopping completely?”

Mengzi replied, “This is as if someone were twisting his elder brother’s arm, and you said to him, ‘How about doing it more gently?’ Simply instruct him in filiality and brotherliness.”

One of the imperial sons had a mother who died. His tutor asked on his behalf to let him mourn for a few months. Gongsun Chou asked, “How about this case?”

Mengzi replied, “In this case, he desires to mourn the full period, but he cannot. Even doing it one extra day would be better than stopping completely. What I had been talking about before was a case in which he did not do it, even though nothing prevented it.”

18. Xunzi on mourning (*Xunzi* 荀子) (tr. Knoblock)

From *Discourse on Ritual Principle* [19.9] Why does mourning extend into the third year? I say that the practice was established to be equal to the emotions involved. Use of these forms ornaments social relations. They provide distinctions between the obligations due near and far relations and the eminent and humble. They admit neither of diminution nor of addition. Thus it is said that they are methods that are matchless and unchanging.

The greater the wound, the longer it remains; the more pain it gives, the more slowly it heals. The practice of mourning into the third year deals with occasions when the extreme pain of grief has reached its pinnacle, so the mourning practices were established to equal the emotions expressed. The unhemmed garment of the mourner, his clothes of sackcloth, and his bamboo staff, the lean-to hut where he lives, the gruel he eat, his brushwood mat, and his clod of earth for a pillow are all emblems of his extreme grief. That the mourning rite is finished in the twenty-fifth month means that even though the grief and pain have not ended and although thoughts of the dead and longing for him have not been forgotten, this ritual practice cuts off these things, for otherwise would not sending off the dead have no conclusion, and must there not be a definite interval for the return to daily life?

As a general principle, all creatures that live between Heaven and Earth and have blood and breath are certain to possess awareness. H aving awareness, each of them loves its own kind. Consider the case off large birds and animals: iff one loses its mate or is separated from its group, then even after a month or season has passed, it is sure to circle when it passes its old home. It looks about, round and round round, crying and calling, sometimes moving, sometimes stopping, gazing about uncertainly and hesitantly, before it can leave the place. Even small birds like swallows and sparrows chatter and cry for a few moments before they can leave. Hence, since no creature with blood and breath has m ore awareness than man, the feeling of a man for his parents is not exhausted even till death.

Will we follow after those stupid provincials and depraved men who by evening have forgotten a parent who died that morning? And if we indulge in such behavior are we not lower even than these birds and beasts? How could we even dwell together in the same community w ith such men and not have disorder! Or will we follow after those “cultivated and ornamented” gentlemen? For them the twenty-five months of the three-year mourning period pass as quickly as a running horse glimpsed through the crack in a wall, and if we follow their example, mourning will have no limit at all. Therefore the Ancient Kings and Sages acted to establish some mean, and to regulate it with a definite interval. As soon as enough time has been allowed to perfect cultivated form and to fulfill the dictates of reason, then mourning was to be put aside.

This being so, how then is it to be apportioned? I say that for one’s closest kin , the completion of a year’s time concludes it. Why is this so? I say: Heaven and Earth have completed their changes, the four seasons have come full circle, and everything under the canopy of heaven has begun anew. Thus, the Ancient Kings based themselves on this and used it for their pattern.

This being so, why is there the practice of mourning into the th ird year? I say it is because they wanted to increase and exalt it, so they caused the time to be doubled and thus a second full year’s time.

For others the time is nine months or less, why is this? I say it is to prevent such mourning periods from equaling the longer periods. Hence, the three-year period is considered the culmination of mourning and the three- and five-month periods its diminution, with the full-year and the nine-month periods falling in between. The highest take their pattern from Heaven, the lowest take theirs from Earth, and the middle take theirs from Man. The ordering principle that allows different people to live together in a community in harmony and unity is therein fully realized. Thus mourning into the third year is the perfection of good form in the Way of Man. Truly this is to be called its perfect culm ination . In this, the Hundred Kings have agreed, and antiquity and today are one and the same.

19. Mozi on simplicity in mourning (*Mozi* 墨子) (tr. Johnston)

From Book 6, *Jie zang* III [6.25) Master Mo Zi spoke, saying: “A benevolent man’s planning for the world is in no way different from a filial son’s planning for his parents. Now what will a filial son’s planning for his parents consist of? I say that, if his parents are poor, he works to make them rich. If the people [sc. of his family] are few, he works to make them numerous. If they are numerous but in disorder, he works to bring them to order. When he has done this, even if his strength is insufficient, if the materials are not enough, if his wisdom is inadequate, he has done what he can. But while ever he has untapped strength, hidden resources or remaining materials, he cannot do otherwise than use them for his parents. It is by discharging these three responsibilities that the filial son makes provision for his parents.

“The case of the benevolent man making provision for the world is just like this. I say that, if the world is poor, he works to make it rich. If the people [sc. of the world] are few, he works to make them numerous. If they are numerous but in disorder, he works to bring them to order. When he has done this, even if his strength is insufficient, if the materials are not enough, if his wisdom is inadequate, he has done what he can. But while ever he has untapped strength, hidden resources or remaining materials, he cannot do otherwise than use them for the world. It is by discharging these three responsibilities that the benevolent man makes provision for the world.”

[. . .] The rules which Master Mo Zi formulates for the conduct of funerals and burials state: “A coffin should be three *cun* [sc. thick], sufficient for rotting bones. Burial garments should be of three layers, sufficient for rotting flesh. The depth of the ground dug out should be such that it does not reach water below, and it does not let vapours escape above. The burial mound should be sufficient to make the place [sc. of burial] recognisable and that is all. There should be weeping going to and from [sc. the funeral], but then there should be a return to the matters of clothing and food. There should be such attention to sacrifices as accords with being filial to parents.” Thus it is said that this is what constitutes Master Mo Zi’s rules not losing the benefits to either the living or to the dead.

Therefore, Master Mo Zi spoke, saying: “Nowadays, the officers and gentlemen of the world, if they sincerely wish in their hearts to be benevolent and righteous, and seek to be superior officers who desire to be in accord with the Way of the sage kings above, and to be in accord with the benefit of the ordinary people of the state below, then it is right that they practise moderation in funerals in their conduct of government. This is something they cannot but examine.”

20. Consolation from Zhuangzi? (*Zhuangzi* 莊子) (tr. Watson)

From ch. *Yang sheng zhu* [“The Secret of Caring for Life,” 3] When Lao Dan died, Qin Shi went to mourn for him, but after giving three cries, he left the room.

“Weren’t you a friend of the Master? ” asked Laozi’s disciples.

“Yes.”

“And you think it’s all right to mourn him this way?”

“Yes,” said Qin Shi. “At first I took him for a real man, but now I know he wasn’t. A little while ago, when I went in to mourn, I found old men weeping for him as though they were weeping for a son, and young men weeping for him as though they were weeping for a mother. To have gathered a group like that, he must have done something to make them talk about him, though he didn’t ask them to talk or make them weep for him, though he didn’t ask them to weep. This is to hide from Heaven, turn your back on the true state of affairs, and forget what you were born with. In the old days, this was called the crime of hiding from Heaven. Your master happened to come because it was his time, and he happened to leave because things follow along . If you are content with the time and willing to follow along, then grief and joy have no way to enter. In the old days, this was called being freed from the bonds of God.

“Though the grease burns out of the torch, the fire passes on, and no one knows where it ends.”

From ch. *Zhi le* [“Supreme Happiness,” 18] Zhuangzi’s wife died. When Huizi went to convey his condolences, he found Zhuangzi sitting with his legs sprawled out, pounding on a tub and singing . “You lived with her, she brought up your children and grew old,” said Huizi. “It should be enough simply not to weep at her death. But pounding on a tub and singing —this is going too far, isn’t it? ”

Zhuangzi said, “You’re wrong. When she first died, do you think I didn’t grieve like anyone else? But I looked back to her beginning and the time before she was born. Not only the time before she was born, but the time before she had a body . Not only the time before she had a body, but the time before she had a spirit. In the midst of the jumble of wonder and mystery, a change took place and she had a spirit. Another change and she had a body. Another change and she was born. Now there’s been another change and she’s dead. It’s just like the progression of the four seasons: spring, summer, fall, winter.

“Now she’s going to lie down peacefully in a vast room. If I were to follow after her bawling and sobbing, it would show that I don’t understand anything about fate. So I stopped.”