



## The King and the Fear

*Taoism - China*


A king famed for his courage and equanimity lost almost his entire kingdom and every last one of his soldiers as a result of the violent attacks and plundering of barbarian hordes. He had only two servants left, and his castle was the last bastion that prevented the invaders from dominating his territories and enslaving the villages decimated by the continuous harassment. The day came when it became known that the barbarians were advancing towards the city gates intending to besiege the palace. It is said that that night, when the news of the enemy approach arrived, the monarch's face was marked by concern and responsibility, but he was not at any time overcome by fear.

At dawn the king ordered his servants to open all the doors and windows, and then took up his position on one of the battlements to watch the arrival of the invaders. Unmoved, he watched them advance to the palace staircase. But his serenity deeply disturbed the barbarians, who thought that a trap awaited them inside the palace. Instead of besieging the place, the leader of the barbarian hordes rallied his men and sounded the retreat.

The king then said to his servants:

‘Never forget that the same emotion, fear, drove them to flee in fright and motivated us to remain at our place, finding a creative response to such a distressing situation.’ □

Adapted by Sī Mǎ Chéng Zhēn (647-735 E.C.).

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## Comments

Sī Mǎ Chéng Zhēn (647-735 C.E.) was a famous Taoist priest of the Táng Dynasty. Born into a family of empire officials, his interest in the Tao led him to distance himself from worldly affairs from an early age.

He was a disciple of Master Pān Shī Zhēng, a Taoist priest of Mount Sōng, one of the five sacred mountains of Taoism, with whom he studied the teachings of the School of Highest Clarity (Shān Yù Xiāo Fēng), eventually leading a life of retreat on Mount Tiān Tái.

However, the Empress Wǔ Zé Tiān heard of him and had him visit the capital, Chang'an, where he was asked to make use of the magical arts of Yīn Yáng divination and to give advice in matters of government. His reply that 'non-action' (Wú Wéi) should be the foundation of all government won him the respect of the emperor.

It would not be the last time he would be called to the capital, and eventually he was asked to stay there, at the Solar Platform Temple.

Master Sī Mǎ Chéng Zhēn based his teachings on the Confucian idea of devotion and on Buddhist theories of mental serenity and the acquisition of wisdom. He developed the Taoist theories of 'Cultivating the Path' and 'Attaining Immortality'. He argued that human beings possess the quality of the Immortals and that, in order to attain it, one had to 'cultivate one's breath of Emptiness', 'follow one's own nature' and 'remain in harmony with the Dào' (Cherng, 2015, p. 52).

## Sources

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Cherng, W. J. (2015). *Daoist Meditation*. London: Singing Dragon.

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### *Associated text of the Earth Charter*

Principle 16f: Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.

### *Other passages that this story illustrates*

The Way Forward: The arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments are all called to offer creative leadership. The partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance.

