



Expository Essay

How To Be A Gentleman

Gaining knowledge on various issues is a continuous part of human existence. Learning helps us make sense of the world. In Hsun Tzu's 'Encouraging learning', he gives various metaphors on how education can mold human beings into virtuous creatures. Education also determines the paths many of us follow in life and if we want to fully live, then we can never stop learning. Through his writing Tzu was able to shape an entire aspect of history. He gave different analogies describing how learning could change perspectives and better the human race in general. A gentleman, according to him, is anyone who seeks education for the betterment of self and uses it to do well. As the gentleman says, "Learning never ceases" (Tzu 1).

There are different perspectives one may look at in becoming a gentleman and one of them is being a student and studying. The results we get out in life are mostly as a result of our actions. The harder one works, the more successful they become. We could look at the 'A' student for instance, a well driven individual who is focused and devotes time and effort in not only learning but mastering the content he/she gains. Then there's the below average student, someone who just chooses not to put any effort into academics. "Achievement consists of never giving up" (Tzu 2). Their grades could be termed as a direct reflection of their hard work. According to Tzu, study is of more value than thought (1). It continually refills your knowledge base giving one insight and purpose day after day. Education gives one a sense of right and wrong, enabling people to live well with each other and shape their lives, it's at all difficult to distinguish someone with a good education from someone with none at all or someone who doesn't care for leaning. You can tell from their personalities and even their actions. Gathering the correct content through study and examination of self makes one's "wisdom be clear and his conduct without fault" (Tzu 1).

Knowledge is like food for the mind, body and soul. It builds virtue and character and separates us from every other person in the world.

Bad company corrupts good morals. That's an old wise saying that most people would term to be true. Friendship is a part of human existence since no one can do it alone. The gentleman chooses well-bred men for friends and carefully chooses his surroundings according to Tzu (2). Everyone needs healthy relationships to be able to bond and share ideas and even for health reasons like reduction of stress. Our friends show the kind of people we are; most of us make friends with people we share common interests. Tzu uses the analogy of a bird that builds its nest on reeds but loses it when the wind blows because the reeds aren't strong enough to hold it (1). Just like the bird, we may build our lives into what we want, with all the right goals and a vision of where we want to be but our friends may destroy it. Psychologically, surrounding yourself with positive energy determines how driven you are and how quickly you get to your goals. A certain orchid root is used in making a perfume called "chih" but if the root were to grow in a vile substance, the perfume would not be appealing (Tzu 2). We all need the right environment in order to grow emotionally and psychologically and to give us motivation whenever we lose sight of our paths in life. More often than not, we surround ourselves with friends and we can only move forward if those friends are the right ones.

According to Tzu, learning basically means achieving oneness (4). You need to be able to finish what you begin and finish it in the best possible way. In order to deal with issues, we all need a certain strategy or a defined approach towards problem solving. The right strategy gets things done. Experience is the best teacher, but it's wise to make use of the intellect of others and the explanations of scholars then you will "become honored and make your way anywhere in the world". The right counsel leads to correct decision making and decisions set off a chain reaction in every aspect of life since all choices have consequences. There's need to carefully consider the people we share counsel with as well as the actions we take to deal with issues. Negativity inside us attracts negativity from all around us and to act towards people

in the wrong way just generally puts a leash on progress and the right ideologies.
“Associate with the learned, there’s nothing more profitable” (Tzu 4).

A gentleman has different character traits and the most important one is understanding the true value of learning. Education shapes our lives and gives everyone an equal chance to go past the boundaries that life sets. Making friends, being a scholar and acting towards others to deal with issues are some of the perspectives we can apply Tzu’s ideology of being a gentleman. Every moment in life is an opportunity to learn something new and it’s up to you to decide what you learn and whether or not to let that lesson take root to influence your life for the better.

Hsün Tzu, Basic Writings, translated by Burton Watson (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pages15-23