

13th October 2021

Discombobulated

**“The sage has sun and moon by his side.
He grasps the universe under his arm.
He blends everything into a harmonious whole,
casts aside whatever is confused or obscured,
and regards the humble as honourable.”**

Chuang Tzu Zhuangzi, Chuang Tzu, ch 2 (286BC)

I lost my glasses. I don't know where, or how, or when, but walking with my pals to a Scotland football match, I realised my glasses weren't where they should have been – on my face. They weren't on the ground. They weren't left in the pub. They weren't handed in after the game. They were well and truly lost. And me? I was completely discombobulated!

The word “discombobulated” is a made-up word which appeared in the US in the mid-19th century. It's a rootless coinage of a word that looks as though it has some meaningful basis, but doesn't. The Latin suffix “com” gives it some substance – as in “discomfit” or “discompose”. But it's made-up, a fun word, that has no significant origin. But, made-up or not, it more than adequately described my state of mind after the disappearance of my glasses. I was confused, disorientated, troubled, ill-at-ease. My eyes were sore. I got a headache. I couldn't read my mobile phone. I had to ask someone to read the display-board at the station to make sure I was on the right train. I didn't know what time it was. I struggled to get my key in the front-door-lock when I got home. Yes, I was well and truly discombobulated. I would like to have been Chuang Tzu's sage, grasping things correctly, blending them into harmony and casting aside whatever is confused or obscured. But I wasn't. I was *very* much discombobulated.

Eventually, I unearthed an old pair of glasses and some sense of normality returned, not quite a “harmonious whole”, but close. But being discombobulated was a learning point for me. I could certainly have handled it better. Perhaps if I'd read more of Chuang Tzu's philosophical thinking, I'd have coped in a more sage-like fashion – provided, of course, I knew where my glasses were so I could read Chuang Tzu in the first place!

A prayer for today

*Lord, bless me with wisdom when I am discombobulated,
and, inwardly, at least, help me to see you and know you better. Amen*

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