

THE BIG IDEAS

Making Use of Solitude

It's a very good idea.

Money and Happiness

Think about the 40%.

The Master

Holds nothing back.

The Shadow

That he himself casts.

The Journey

Of a thousand miles.

Compete?

Nah, let's playfully create!

All Things Change

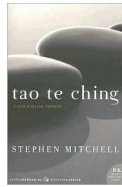
So flow with it, yo! :)

The Master Carpenter

And the master gardener.

*"Knowing others is
intelligence; knowing
yourself is true wisdom.
Mastering others is
strength; mastering yourself
is true power."*

~ Lao Tzu



Tao te Ching

A New English Version by Stephen Mitchell

BY LAO TZU (TRANSLATED BY STEPHEN MITCHELL) · HARPER PERENNIAL © 1992 · 144 PAGES

"I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures. Simple in actions and in thoughts, you return to the source of being. Patient with both friends and enemies, you accord with the way things are. Compassionate toward yourself, you reconcile all beings in the world."

~ Lao Tzu from *Tao te Ching*

The *Tao te Ching*: A classic of spiritual literature and the central text of Taoism.

Although the text's authorship and date of composition continues to be debated, tradition holds that it was written by the great master, Lao Tzu, in the 6th century BCE (roughly the same time Buddha was rockin' Nepal/India, Confucius was getting his wisdom on in another part of China and not too long before Socrates was getting his toga + hemlock on in Athens).

There are a lot of translations out there. I went with Stephen Mitchell's simple pocket version for this Note because a) it's a great intro if you're new to Lao Tzu/Taoism; and, b) I love the fact that Mitchell is married to Byron Katie and that they co-wrote *Loving What Is* (see Notes) and *A Thousand Names for Joy* together! (How cool is that?!? :)

Mitchell is a remarkable guy in his own right. According to Wikipedia, he's done translations in German, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and Danish as well as interpretative versions of works in Chinese, Sanskrit and ancient Babylonian. Um, wow.

As you can imagine, the *Tao te Ching* is brimming with wisdom and Big Ideas. I've picked a handful of my favorites for discussion and hope you enjoy! :)

MAKING USE OF SOLITUDE

"Ordinary men hate solitude. But the Master makes use of it, embracing his aloneness, realizing he is one with the whole universe."

Stillness. If we want to tune into the Divine, we've gotta soak it up!

Deepak Chopra says this about it in his transformative classic *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* (see Notes): *"But first, you have to practice stillness. Stillness is the first requirement of manifesting your desires, because in stillness lies your connection to the field of pure potentiality that can orchestrate an infinity of details for you."*

Joseph Campbell talks about the importance of feeding our bliss with quiet: *"This is an absolute necessity for anybody today. You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day, where you don't know what was in the newspapers this morning, you don't know who your friends are, you don't know what you owe anybody, you don't know what anybody owes you. This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be. This is the place of creative incubation. At first you might find that nothing happens there. But if you have a sacred place and use it, something eventually will happen."*

So... How's *your* stillness workin' for you? You hate it or embrace it? Can you turn off the TV or

the talk radio or the Internet (+ the cell phone and iPod and ...) and immerse yourself in some sacred silence today? (and tomorrow and... :)

MONEY AND HAPPINESS

“Fame or integrity: which is more important? Money or happiness: which is more valuable? Success or failure: which is more destructive? If you look to others for fulfillment, you will never truly be fulfilled. If your happiness depends on money, you will never be happy with yourself. Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you.”

Powerful. Let's focus, for the moment, on this:

“Men are born soft and supple; dead, they are stiff and hard. Plants are born tender and pliant; dead, they are brittle and dry. Thus whoever is stiff and inflexible is a disciple of death. Whoever is soft and yielding is a disciple of life. The hard and stiff will be broken. The soft and supple will prevail.”

~ Lao Tzu

--> “If your happiness depends on money, you will never be happy with yourself.”

That's pretty much been scientifically proven at this point. Beyond a certain level of sustenance living, money just doesn't make us as happy as we think it will. In fact, in her great book *The How of Happiness* (see Notes), Sonja Lyubomirsky tells us that while 50% of our happiness levels are influenced by our genetics and 40% are under our direct control (via thoughts and behaviors), only 10% is attributed to stuff like money, cars, houses, etc.

Unfortunately, most of us spend most of our time chasing the material affluence (or at least signs of it) that we THINK will make us happy. It doesn't. We get on what psychologists call a “hedonic treadmill” and the more we get, the more we want. After the quick hit of the new car or home or wardrobe wears off, we want MORE. And, tragically, we're rarely able to hold a desire for more with a deep appreciation for what we have.

Eek. Not a good recipe.

The solution? In Sonja's words, we've gotta focus on the 40% that's within our control. As she says: “What makes up this 40 percent? Besides our genes and the situations that we confront, there is one critical thing left: our behavior. Thus the key to happiness lies not in changing our genetic makeup (which is impossible) and not in changing our circumstances (i.e., seeking wealth or attractiveness or better colleagues, which is usually impractical), but in our daily intentional activities. With this in mind, our pie chart illustrates the potential of the 40 percent that is within our ability to control, the 40 percent for room to maneuver, for opportunities to increase or decrease our happiness levels through what we do in our daily lives and how we think.”

THE MASTER HOLDS NOTHING BACK

“The Master gives himself up to whatever the moment brings. He knows that he is going to die, and he has nothing left to hold on to: no illusions in his mind, no resistances in his body. He doesn't think about his actions; they flow from the core of his being. He holds nothing back from life; therefore he is ready for death, as a man is ready for sleep after a good day's work.”

Beautiful. Reminds me of Marcus Aurelius' wisdom from his classic *Meditations* (see Notes). He advises us: “Take it that you have died today, and your life's story is ended; and henceforward regard what future time may be given you as an uncovenanted surplus, and live it out in harmony with nature.”

He also tells us: “Were you to live three thousand years, or even thirty thousand, remember that the sole life which a man can lose is that which he is living at the moment; and furthermore, that he can have no other life except the one he loses... This means that the longest life and the shortest amount to the same thing. For the passing minute is every man's equal possession, but what has once gone by is not ours.”

Do you think you're gonna live forever? And, so what if you do? The ONLY thing we have is THIS moment and THIS moment and...

So, let's embrace what the moment brings and remember Seneca's wisdom: "As it is with a play, so it is with life—what matters is not how long the acting lasts, but how good it is."

And, as he says: "Every day, therefore, should be regulated as if it were the one that brings up the rear, the one that rounds out and completes our lives."

THE SHADOW THAT HE HIMSELF CASTS

"A great nation is like a great man: When he makes a mistake, he realizes it. Having realized it, he admits it. Having admitted it, he corrects it. He considers those who point out his faults as his most benevolent teachers. He thinks of his enemy as the shadow that he himself casts."

Love it. First, let's change our perception around seeing our faults. It's a POSITIVE thing to catch ourselves doing something less than our best. And, let's take a peek at the shadows we're casting.

First, the positive negativity. Vernon Howard says this in his classic *The Power of Your Supermind* (see Notes): "Encourage yourself by remembering that any detection of negativity within you is a positive act, not a negative one. Awareness of your weakness and confusion makes you strong because conscious awareness is the bright light that destroys the darkness of negativity. Honest self-observation dissolves pains and pressures that formerly did their dreadful work in the darkness of unawareness. This is so important that I urge you to memorize and reflect upon the following summary: Detection of inner negativity is not a negative act, but a courageously positive act that makes you a new person."

And Michael Beckwith (see Notes on *Spiritual Liberation*) says pretty much the same thing here: "Not all pain is negative, even though we label all forms of pain as such and resist them. Positive-negativity is a circumstance that causes us to go deeper, to search ourselves, to stop placing blame on the causes of suffering outside ourselves, and take self-responsibility."

Circumstances arise and hard times come so that we may grow through them, so that we may evolve. I like to say that a bad day for the ego is a good day for the soul. When we look back on some of our most challenging experiences, we admit that we wouldn't trade what we gained from them for remaining the same as we were. Something within acknowledges that during those times when we are pressed against the ropes of life, we learn to become more generous, to forgive, to never give up on ourselves or others. We learn to regenerate, to rejuvenate, to surrender."

So, let's redefine our relationship to pain/faults/seeing challenges, shall we?!?

And, now for a little shadow fun. As Lao Tzu says: "He thinks of his enemy as the shadow that he himself casts."

This is echoed throughout the modern literature as well. One of my favorite books on the subject, and a great intro to our shadow challenges, is Debbie Ford's *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers* (see Notes). She says it's as if we have electrical sockets on our chest and if we're ever triggered by someone it's because they "plugged into" an aspect of ourselves that we haven't fully owned. If we've integrated the trait we're finding so annoying in the other person, we might observe the annoying behavior, but we wouldn't be unduly TRIGGERED by it.

That make sense? The idea that we "project our shadow" on others and are triggered by our own disowned attributes showing up in others is a huge idea.

Here's how the guys from *The Power of Full Engagement* (see Notes) put it: "Difficult and unpleasant as it may be to accept, we often feel most hostile to those who remind us of aspects of ourselves that we prefer not to see. 'Ask someone to give a description of the personality type which he finds most despicable, most unbearable and hateful, and most impossible to get along with,' writes Edward Whitmont, 'and he will produce a description of his own repressed characteristics.... These very qualities are so unacceptable to him precisely because they

represent his own repressed side; only that which we cannot accept within ourselves do we find impossible to live with in others.' Think for a moment of someone you actively dislike. What quality in that person do you find most objectionable? Now ask yourself, 'How am I that?'"

We can obviously go off on this for awhile. And we do in the other Notes. For now, let's view our flaws with a smile and ask "How am I *that*?!" when we find ourselves fiery! :)

THE JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES

"Prevent trouble before it arises. Put things in order before they exist. The giant pine tree grows from a tiny sprout. The journey of a thousand miles starts from beneath your feet."

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step."

Or, as Mitchell adapts it here: *"The journey of a thousand miles starts from beneath your feet."*

SUCH a powerful concept and SO easy to forget and/or ignore.

One of my favorite books on the subject is called *One Small Step* by Robert Maurer. (Side note: My friend Sean Stephenson recommended this book. Sean's a therapist/coach/public speaker who shares the stage with people like His Holiness the Dalai Lama and, little detail: He was born with a crippling bone disorder that left him THREE feet tall. Stunning story you can learn more about in his book *Get Off Your 'But' and Take a Stand!*)

Anyhoo, back to *One Small Step*. In this GREAT book, Maurer tells us how important it is to avoid the overwhelm we can feel when we see the enormity of making a change. And, he points out the fact that usually this fear isn't even on a conscious level—it's our subconscious (technically our amygdala) trying to protect us from change it sees as threatening. The solution, as he sees it, is to side-step this fear mechanism by starting small.

He tells us that rather than get intimidated by the huge exercise plan, just commit to stepping in place during ONE commercial break a day for 30 days. Or commit to flossing just one tooth a night. It may sound silly but it's amazing. I often do it with these Notes. Sometimes finishing the Note (or certainly finishing all 100 Notes when I first started) feels a little daunting when I'm not totally feeling "on." So, I'll say to myself, *"Self, let's just do ONE Big Idea then we're good."* (btw: it's VERY important you address yourself as "self." Hehe. :) What often happens is that I get on a roll and before I know it the Note's done.

Same thing with the exercise plan or the flossing or the...

Remember: *"The journey of a thousand miles starts from beneath your feet."*

So... What's *your* next step? All you EVER have to worry about is the next step. And the next and the ...

(P.S. Here's an incredible story Maurer shares in his book you might dig: *"The study of persuasive techniques consistently demonstrates kaizen's power to melt even the toughest resistance. In one rather humorous study, homeowners in one Southern California neighborhood were asked by volunteers if they would mind displaying a small sign that read 'Be a safe driver' in one of their windows. Most of them agreed. Homeowners in another neighborhood chosen for its similarity to the first were not asked to display the sign. Two weeks later, homeowners in both neighborhoods were asked if they would allow a billboard bearing the same message to be installed on their front lawns. They were shown photos that made it plain their house would be dwarfed by the billboard. To make the request even less attractive, the lettering on the billboard was poorly executed. The group that had not been approached about the small sign refused the billboard 83 percent of the time; the group that had made the small step in the first neighborhood, however, agreed to the billboard 76 percent of the time. The small step made the larger one four times more likely."*)

(P.P.S. More mojo from the Lao Tzu-inator: “Confront the difficult while it is still easy; accomplish the great task by a series of small acts.”)

COMPETE? NAH, LET’S PLAYFULLY CREATE!

“The best athlete wants his opponent at his best. The best general enters the mind of his enemy. The best businessman serves the communal good. The best leader follows the will of the people. All of them embody the virtue of non-competition. Not that they don’t love to compete, but they do it in the spirit of play. In this they are like children and in harmony with the Tao.”

Brilliant. Did you know the origin of the word *compete* has nothing to do with our modern idea of going “against” someone else? Noperz. The word comes from the Latin *competere* and means to ‘strive or contend for (something),’ TOGETHER *not* *against*!! (from *com-* ‘together’ + *petere* ‘aim at, seek’).

And I love Wallace D. Wattles’ mojo on the subject. In *The Science of Getting Rich* (see Notes), he tells us: “*You are to become a creator, not a competitor; you are going to get what you want, but in such a way that when you get it every other man will have more than he has now.*”

Personally, I think the whole idea of “competing against” someone is absurd. As one of my mentors once told me, “Until you’re cloned, you have no competition.” My intention is always to simply go within myself and have fun striving to most fully express myself in service to the world. I spend NO time doing “competitive analysis” or worrying what other people are doing aside from recognizing cool stuff that I might want to do more of.

How ‘bout you? Are you finding yourself overly concerned with striving *against* peeps? Can you focus more on being a creator fully expressing yourself and giving your gifts to the world in the spirit of play?

ALL THINGS CHANGE

“If you realize that all things change, there is nothing you will try to hold on to.”

Change. This is another one of those themes we come back to again and again. How ‘bout a few of my favorites on the subject?

Marcus Aurelius talks about this often: “*Time is a river, the resistless flow of all created things. One thing no sooner comes in sight than it is hurried past and another is borne along, only to be swept away in its turn.*” He also says: “*Reflect often upon the rapidity with which all existing things, or things coming into existence, sweep past us and are carried away.*” Plus: “*Even while a thing is in the act of coming into existence, some part of it has already ceased to be.*”

Anthony de Mello tells us (see Notes on Awareness): “*As the great Confucius said, ‘The one who would be in constant happiness must frequently change.’ Flow. But we keep looking back, don’t we? We cling to things in the past and cling to things in the present... Do you want to enjoy a symphony? Don’t hold on to a few bars of the music. Don’t hold on to a couple of notes. Let them pass, let them flow. The whole enjoyment of a symphony lies in your readiness to allow the notes to pass...*”

While Heraclitus reminds us: “*No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man.*”

So, how ‘bout you?

Are you holding on to anything a little more than might be wise?! Let’s embrace change and remember Robert Cooper’s insight from *The Other 90%* (see Notes) that: “*The origin of the word change is the Old English cambium, which means “to become.”*”

THE MASTER CARPENTER

“Trying to control the future is like trying to take the master carpenter’s place. When you handle the master carpenter’s tools, chances are that you’ll cut yourself.”

Beautiful.

And it goes well with another one of my favorite thoughts on this theme.

Sonia Choquette says this in her great book *Trust Your Vibes* (see Notes): “*Timing is the Divine’s way of again reminding us that we co-create with the Universe—we aren’t doing it alone. We plant, water, and weed the seeds of creativity, but we don’t have the power to make them grow, let alone grow according to our schedule. How it all unfolds is up to God. God’s wisdom will fulfill our deepest intentions once we set them in motion. Our part is to create the perfect conditions for the Universe to flow through us—much like our job is to create the perfect conditions for the garden to grow—but that’s all we can do. God flows through us and develops our gardens according to his own timetable. And thank goodness for that, because God knows and grows better than we do.*”

Let’s let the master carpenter/gardener do its work as we embrace the wisdom of the Tao, shall we? :)

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

If you liked this Note,
you’ll probably like...

Loving What Is
The Bhagavad Gita
The Dhammapada
Meditations
Seven Spiritual Laws
of Success
Trust Your Vibes
Awareness

About the Authors & Translator of “Tao te Ching”:

LAO TZU AND STEPHEN MITCHELL



Lao Tzu was a philosopher of ancient China and is a central figure in Taoism. Lao Tzu literally means “Old Master” and is generally considered an honorific. According to Chinese tradition, he lived in the 6th century BC. Historians variously contend that he is a synthesis of multiple historical figures, that he is a mythical figure, or that he actually lived in the 4th century BC. A central figure in Chinese culture, both nobility and common people claim Lao Tzu in their lineage. (Adapted from Wikipedia where you can learn more.)



Stephen Mitchell has written extensively about spirituality, drawing from both Eastern and Western traditions. He is a poet and one of the world’s preeminent translators — of *Rilke*; *Psalms*; *Genesis*; *Job*; of *Yehuda Amichai*; *the Bhagavad Gita*; *Tao Te Ching*; and of other essential works. (Adapted from the book.) Learn more at **StephenMitchellBooks.com**.

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is a lover of wisdom (aka a “Philosopher”) and a passionate student of life who’s committed to inspiring and empowering millions of people to live their greatest lives as he studies, embodies and shares the universal truths of optimal living. He harts his job.