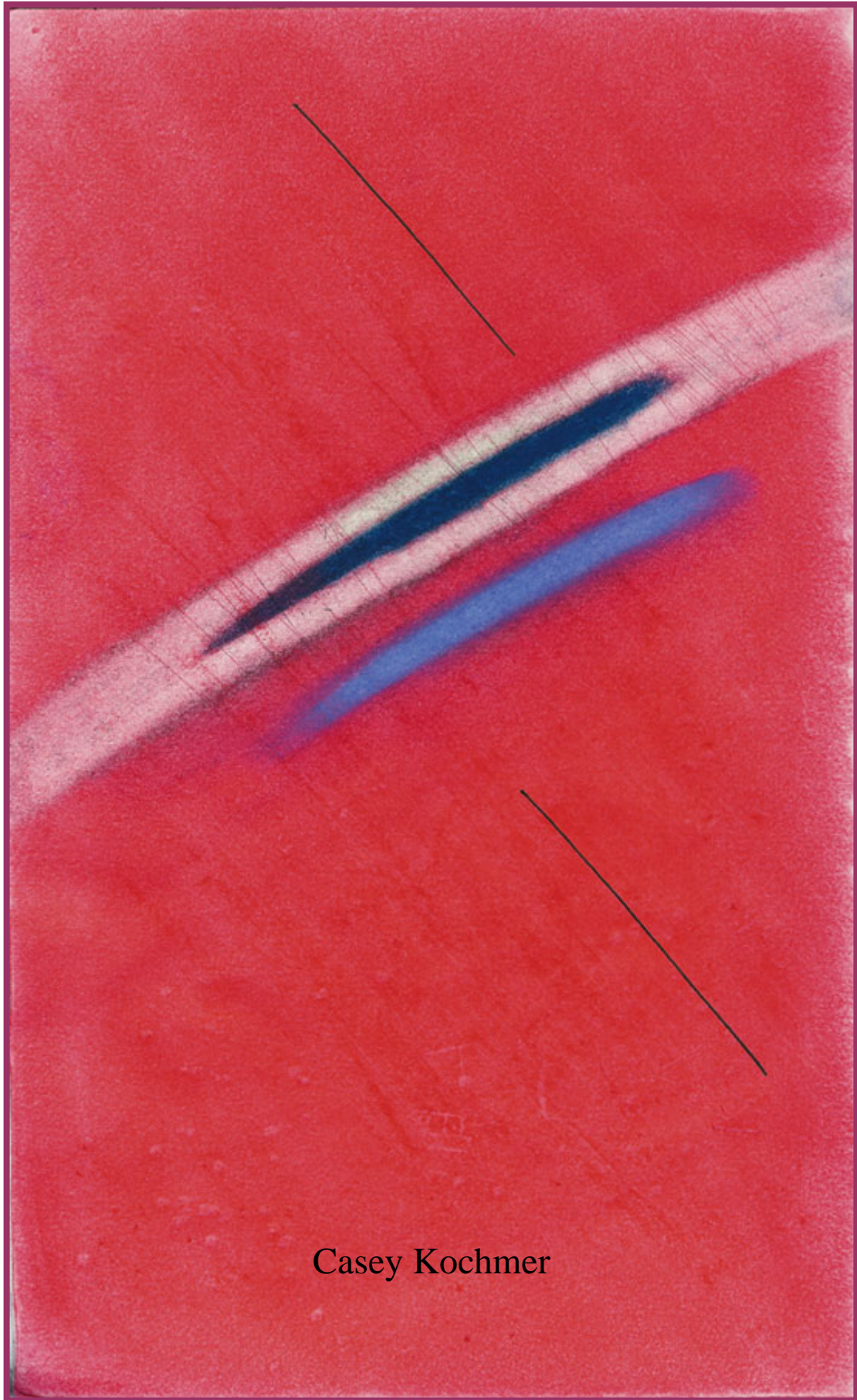
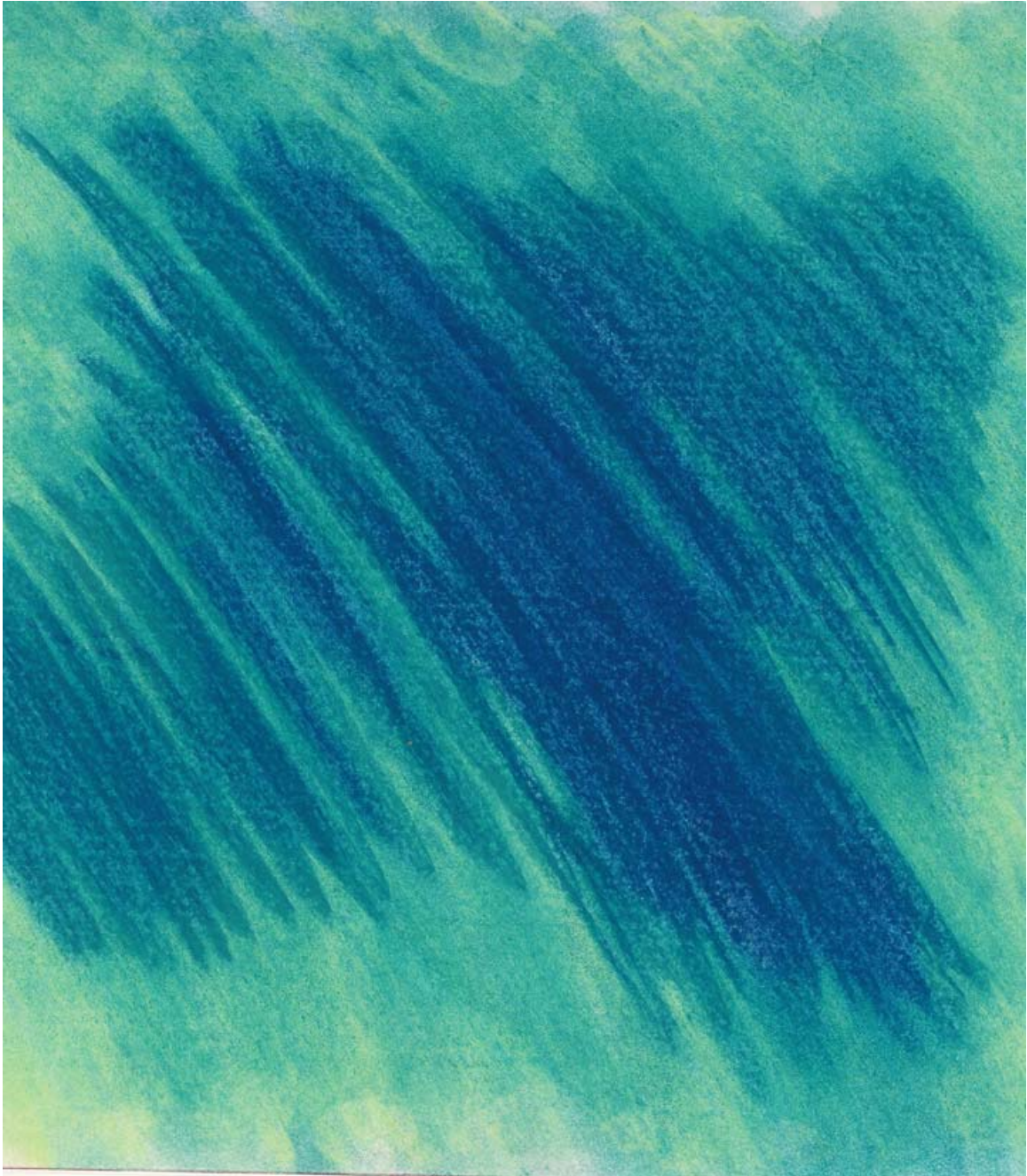


A Personal Tao



Casey Kochmer



Raven: Julie Alessio – 2005

A Personal Tao

Print Edition

<http://www.personaltao.com>



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Kochmer, Casey, 1964-
A Personal Tao / Casey Kochmer
Library of Congress Control Number: 2005905211

Print Copy ISBN: 0-9769674-2-1

E-Book ISBN: 0-9769674-0-5

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Version History:

First Print Release January 2006
Online 4th Edition Release January 2006
Online 3rd Edition Release December 2005
Online 2nd Edition Release September 2005
Online 1st Public Release July 2005
First Draft April 2005
Conceptual Notes May 2001-March 2005

Editors: Julie Alessio & Kristopher Hicks-Green

Amberjack Software LLC
Olympia, WA



Photo by Brandi Eide 2005

Dedication

Julie for pure love and acceptance, ever the morning star
Erica for the kick into dreams
Kendall and Clay growing
Bob for being bob
Jonathon as someone to look up to
Dad, because of your true heart
Mom letting me be free
Jennifer within first love
Rhonda's cascading friendship
Jayson for balance
Mars and Joseph in spoken word
Clifford and Gerald opening worlds
Bonnie (and yes Regina) for wit
Jay embracing an inner child
Shari for painting a sun on the wall and my life
TLar for the sword battles
Vicky the bestest neighbor
Sky for hope awakening
Bryan as a wise ass
Chris & Lynne as family
Sequoia and Susan reflections upon still water
Buddy for the monkey poetry
Wren for wisdom
John for his laughter
Brisamina as my dancing ninja evening star
And an unknown stranger long long ago for a smile

So many threads loving in and out of what we each become
Fraying, reweaving, experiencing daily renewal
Ever living

Truth and Peace to all

Please note: The Personal Tao *Online Edition* is free.

Download at: <http://www.personaltao.com>

Please pass it on!

To support offering the free online version of the book, I am counting on your recommendations to help distribute the book. I believe we can make a difference by reaching out. The goal is to improve society, not by changing the world, but simply in helping people discover their own nature.

For readers interested in printed material I do sell several hand bound limited editions of this work. These books are sold as handcrafted works of art. The price varies on each order due to the hand customization within each copy. The print edition strives to recreate older traditions of making each printed book unique.

Purchase requests can be sent to:

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I can be contacted at PersonalTao@gmail.com for any general information.
Thanks much for the time you spend reading this book.



Casey

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Reflections

In the days
We find time
Time like clouds
moving on by

In ourselves
We find life
Life as a river
flowing to the sea

But time and life
on their own
have no measure

In others we find noitcelfer | reflection
reflection like ourselves
gives us m-e-a-s-u-r-e

From each other
we find our poems.
Poems like our souls,
holding secrets only a few may share.

I have known many people
perhaps your smiles can become poems to share
I have seen many reflections
maybe yours will become clear to me

Time moves, measured in heart beats.
Within this rhythm,
discovering the mysteries of the world.

Layout

This work purposely breaks rules. So follow suit, meandering to whatever calls. This will allow for a more natural form of exploration.

Reveal this work at the pace of your own life,
rather than the metered speed of the written words.

Each section limits itself as a small self-contained topic. While it would be possible to write an entire book on each topic, the goal is simplicity. Long, detailed writings would actually hinder the process of learning, as it would introduce too many tangents to the central theme:

Taoism is simply the process of living to one's own nature.

To illustrate the Tao, the text mirrors human nature by becoming a mixture of Poetry, Art, Literature and Spoken Word.

===== Paths =====

The Tao isn't a path; the path is our lives meandered.

In life I have discovered finding my way has at times been a difficult undertaking. The path sections are lessons learned from my own wanderings as a Taoist.

I also contradict myself at times. This is part of the process of understanding ourselves and the Tao. Contradictions are often found when looking at something from a different perspective. Experience is based purely on perspective. Contradictions within a person are an indicator that he or she has traveled several distinct paths within life, incorporating different viewpoints and truths.

A contradiction is the starting point to a more complete understanding.

===== Thoughts =====

To help make this a living book you are encouraged to add feedback. Write down what comes to mind. No self restrictions. All too often while reading, something important comes to mind, only to slip past as we continue to read. Let ideas run freely; mix the moisture of your own inspiration to this work.

Everything here is meant to inspire self expression.

Write, draw, paint, splash out some of your own spirit and release something new onto these pages. This in turn releases you from the bindings of traditional books so that this becomes a more personal learning experience.

Simply put:

Write openly of yourself to be yourself.

Let loose spirit to reveal soul.

Freedom is rooted within sharing expression...

A blank canvas
White page
Devoid of meaning

Could be many things, this page, my life...
I could be obtuse,
Could list to the side three other things

But let's be direct
My life is blank at times

I could tell all the reasons it isn't so
The Mona Lisa smile of my love
The wait,
no side tracking
no trying to explain... away.

Feeling blank
means being empty.

Face it

Crumble the page
Dirty it up
Write something down
Dash the ink about

The page is mine to do with as I desire

Crumple it, tear it, burn it,
leave it blank, walking away
maybe doodle or
build
origami cranes,
paper airplanes

or

simply write the day away

Always a choice on how to

Use the page

Looking back
this time
The choice was to write.

Tao

Science is fact

Religion is faith

Magic is perception

Know these boundaries to discover what lies beyond.

What is Tao?

The Tao cannot be described, yet a person will express it simply by being alive.

It is possible to list definitions from the dictionary, from various documents. Each definition: a set of words echoing reality. Living to the Tao is not a summarization found within the mathematics of word play. Poetry, philosophy, literature all offer only helpful guidance but never the actual Tao. A simple analogy would be swimming under the water. It's possible to read about snorkeling or diving, but until diving under the water, feeling the pressure, experiencing undersea life, having lungs squeeze outside-in yet feeling inside-out from pushing down as deeply as you can dive, only to resurface to feel a sudden gasp of wet air... all of this is an idea approximated by a reader but only grasped by the experienter. When the last line was read by a friend of mine, she said: *"but when you snorkel the pressure doesn't feel like that"*. Surprised, I asked her if she ever dove to about 25 feet while snorkeling, she said no, at which moment we both realized how personal the experience becomes due to differences in the path taken. This example touches why discovering the Tao is a personal, living experience.

The key for writing and reading this comes down to the following chain of thought: Words are never about the Tao, words are always about us. Sometimes to understand ourselves, we need to write aloud a personal truth as it is human nature and hence the Tao to do so. Reflections in this document become one possible outline to help myself be... myself, while giving others a chance to comment and contemplate their own personal situation. This then becomes a circular process between author, reader and everyone involved to help define and discover their own Personal Tao.

So

Move, tumble, stumble, spin poetry, swirl, dance

The Personal Tao is about *self discovery*.

Footnote:

The Tao is pronounced several different ways.
Yet Tao is most often pronounced as “Dow”.

The Tao has several different spellings.
Most commonly it appears either as Dao or Tao.

Connections

...

Connect the dots...

A strong desire exists for people to find connections. This in turn becomes patterns, literature and music. Think about music for a moment, in life, as life.

The moments are notes
Strung together, this becomes a song of life
Our consciousness the melody
The tempo, is the heart beating.

As an aside, it could be said:

The 20th century tempo has been replaced by alarms and seconds of a time clock.
 compared to the previous clock of the farmer's seasons
 compared to the previous clock of various tides
 compared to the previous clock of
Seemingly always a clock somewhere
<!-- To be blatant: the key word is "seemingly" -->

Melody is a rhythmic succession or arrangement of sound: similarly our life is a rhythmic succession or arrangement of moments. Humans love melody since humans have the capability to flow with the melody. The melody's very nature permits reflective discovery. Similarly: if life can be considered to be a melody, it becomes possible to self discover and harmonize with our own lives.

The problem within this analogy: many people try too hard. It's tempting to treat life as sheet music: looking for the notes to be handed to us, to be read. Rather, we must be receptive, listening to our lives. Over time, it becomes possible to learn various patterns of our nature. Relax, don't "over anticipate". The song of life is about change. In time, with time, learn to flow with your song¹ as it happens.

The first step: learn to accept the individual notes of life a moment at a time.

1) Much like improv Jazz

Notes from my journal...

- A single dot:

At times you have to hold onto sorrow
as if it were the only thing.
At times you have to release song
as it becomes all you are.

- A single dot:

Jasmine scent, sneaks underneath summer heat.

Summer heat not too thick
yet
thick enough to feel fingers
 slightly sweaty fingers
 conducting across moist glistening skin

First day of summer.
What note, tempo, beat, harmonic
is worth reaching for: under a siesta sun?

Leading back to chords of Jasmine
Tying scents of rhapsody
 Not all music is of melody.

- A single dot:

Overhearing a conversation she said:
“I can’t have anything without faith, but I can’t have faith without anything.”

- A single dot:

Busy week here, working away in little moments which always seem to get
mislaidd somewhere in the hustle of more work.

- A single **long** dot:

Time, this is a time:

Where mindless machines are built, to scour the heavens, touch the planets, fueling dreams of those wishing to reach the stars. While humanity actually touches the dead gods with machines of steel and gold. Robotic eyes spinning around fleet Mercury, or probes to prod the Titan of Saturn.

Where philosophers and magicians rely on sleight of hand to show those sleeping that "Magic" can still exist. While scientists practice another slight of hand to permit horses to birth a zebra, genetically paint day-glo / glow-in-the-dark tropical fish and dream of bringing to life dinosaurs from the stones of fossils.

... It's hard not to connect the dots at times ...
... As connections just appear out of nowhere...

Did you know one day we will resurrect Ludwig van Beethoven? As he translated his soul into music, a day will come when science might "reverse-engineer" him from those very same notes.

Where religion anchors souls down on the ground rather than in flight

Stained glass bleeds light down, down as
 blurred colors brushed against gray pillars to heaven

Which is the path?
 one to the altar
 or
 one back up within rays of light

While candle flames lift to the sky
 blessings as landing pads to saints
 coming back down to those tied to earth.
 The smell of mothballs comes forth from opening of a holy book
 like my mother's Greek Orthodox mother's linen closet
 yet now issuing out from the church altar.
 How many souls flew too high?
 Fumigated back down by the vapors of spoken words?

It's a time not different from any other point in human history: we are still very human. Still human despite attempts to digitize law and force our behaviors to match legislation written in zeros and ones.

- A single dot:

Imagine sitting down, beside an old maple tree.
Close the eyes.
Feel dappled sunlight dancing on skin,
 Leaves eclipse stray beams
 as shadows tango to the light across the body.
Listen to leaves whisper
 joy as the wind tussles them
 into the air.
Smile as branches complain
 in creaking strains
 as younger leaves bounce in play.

Dots, Dots, Dots...

... Capture a dot, enwrite a moment on this page ...

Did you get stuck on the word enwrite?

Give it meaning by capturing a moment later.

Everything laid within these pages are simply dots, specks of writing. Some of which, a reader will connect to personal experience. Others are free-flowing, possibly to remain only as distinct questions or memories.

- A single dot:



Destination or Beginning?

A single dot:
Dreamtime in Street Chalk



===== Paths =====

The path here is simple: In life moments will gather. Don't overly worry about connections. When the connection is apparent: run with it. When a moment is just a moment: live it, only as a moment. Not everything needs to be connected into a larger meaning. Many things are best left alone. If the moment calls to be connected, then the overall balance of the world will make it clear to you without much fuss.

It's always tempting to frame life within arbitrary points



Another style of discovery is to explore the opposite side of one's nature.

If it's in our nature to be a pattern, to connect the dots, then flip this around. Stand disconnected for a moment. Do nothing, or the unexpected, or anything... attempt to be truly disconnected, in order to discover your own patterns. Instead of connecting the dots, let the dots fall into place, as they will, and enjoy life as each disconnected dot flows on past.

The Way

Tao is a Chinese term which translates literally as the “way”. The first written text to describe the Tao is the Tao-Te Ching written by Lao-Tzu (The old master). The Tao-Te Ching is a series of poems that can be considered to be a work of philosophy, a treatise on how to run a government, a how-to book towards a balanced life or a sage’s reflection of humanity and the universe. It is known to have been written over 2400 years ago but not much else is retained about the origins. Many fun stories abound about these origins; however, these are just that, stories¹. What is important is that the Tao-Te Ching and its poetry survive, having had an impact on the course of human events over the past 2400 years. It’s an interesting book, worth skimming. I say “skim” because it is written in a light-hearted manner. If a reader stares too hard or takes the Tao-Te Ching too literally, the multiple intentions within the poetry will be lost.

Most interestingly, a person who never reads the Tao-Te Ching may be closer to the Tao than a person who reads the Tao-Te Ching a thousand times. The Tao is a personal truth unique to everyone. Personal truth is not found in another person’s writing: it’s found within us. Taoist sages and the Tao-Te Ching will only act as a guide; the actual discovery of truth is always performed through our own actions.

This creates an interesting problem: How to explain something which is unique to each person? A tack often taken is to use metaphors or similes such as:

Discovering the Tao is swimming in the deepest of rivers, where the more one examines the Tao, the deeper it becomes. A person starts off swimming with simple movement; this is the Tao. Our choices made in exploring the river means everyone meanders thru an entire *personal* universe, yet the entire *outer* universe has its own currents which buffet and influence each one of us - **completely**- back. This is the Tao. Finally, enlightenment occurs when a person awakens upon the other shore of the river, where both the river and their clothes are gone, leaving one naked in the sand. This is also the Tao.

Metaphors / similes, while powerful, often leave people thinking: “**Huh?**” as they fail to create a direct answer. The point is to invoke a person’s consideration of their own personal experiences. This process of self reflection is the tool used to describe the Tao. However, this approach often has the problem of being confusing or even useless as we all have very different experiences.

The other common Taoist tact is to only use indirect references and “‘not’ logic” to define the Tao. “Not” logic works since the Tao in large part is outside of our overall experience. It’s a similar concept to infinity. Just when you have a number big enough to describe infinity, you add one, and the identity of infinity expands out yet again, to become different yet the same. The Tao represents the other side of infinity as the fundamental absolute.

1) Some of these stories could be true, and some could be fables. As a Taoist, the point is to learn from the mixing of our reactions to the tales. Veracity is best left to history; time will change “truth” for each generation.

Using these basics, anyone can seemingly become a Taoist master and easily assemble standard mystical answers about the Tao. For example:

Knowing of the Tao should not change anything. But it does, just as knowing yourself really shouldn't change who you are, but does. It's the difference between being material or the reflection in the mirror. When the answer is we are both, more and less..... The Tao is every contradiction, every truth and each of the standard circular Yoda Yoga style answers... leaving us trying to hold flowing water in a single *hand*. Try to grasp it, and it's gone, yet our *hands* are wet. Accept the fact that we are each a contradiction. This is the truth being described when answers are bantered about: using one impossible statement to prove another impossible statement...

Forget these endless answers. *Instead Relax*

A reality is: the Tao's definition always changes. It is as we say in the United States: "*It's all about me*". The funny thing is that from one angle this is right, especially in terms of a Personal Tao. The confusion comes from one simple question: how constant is your definition of self? If you were a rock, you would pretty much know what you were, over time getting eroded into sand then to become dust. But humans lead interestingly convoluted transformative lives before becoming dust! The beauty and complexity of the Tao comes from the constant changing in the way we live and in turn the attempt to describe our own path.

The Tao is a crux and puzzle which becomes the lever to help one lead a more balanced life. The reason is simple: humans have limits, yet our aspirations are limitless. The goal is to touch and embrace these limitless possibilities. Within these aspirations one can find the Tao waiting for them as a reward. The reward we seek isn't the destination, but the path itself. This means finding Tao is attainable within ourselves simply by living. Hence we always have access to our Personal Tao.



Tides

Tide of emotions
Joy to sadness to Joy
These tides sweep
body mind spirit
Where thoughts ache and relax
to pinpricks of pure joy
wrapping caresses of absolute sadness

Being alive ejaculates in being awashed
It's unpredictable tumbling
of ever-receding waves
Feelings mixed to chaotic elements of
sand, air, water, fire of life, tumult... and ... strangely, calmness

A moment between the tides
Finding peace not within the calm
rather within the tumult to come

To be awashed in joy
is so simple
the answer being...

Have to go now
not to embrace, rather to go ...
dancing sleepingly
dancing in thoughts
Chasing waves not to catch
in fingers to only feel passing moments
Chasing in tumbling swirling and moving in time

To feel the tumult
To be the tide

===== A path paved over thoughts =====

What is the tide? It isn't an object in itself. Give it a name: Tide, and it becomes distinct due to the name. The tide is not a thing. The effects are felt but when grasped it's the water that touches us back. The true nature of a tide isn't the water, it's a mixture of processes related within a dance. It's the moon and earth swinging. It's the sun adding its tempo with storms and wind. It is water being pull and pushed from gravity piling up in the beating of what we call the "Tide".

The Tao is a tide of tides.

Harmony with the Tao means flowing with all the various forces connecting everything seemingly invisible yet still measurable in relative effects.

Whenever describing the Tao, I have discovered the need to use different terms for each person. Every one is awash in their own tumult. Even for myself, I developed a personal language which helps me come to terms with my nature. I spent years creating journals, poetry and art, all to document my experiences. Once capturing snapshots of living within my writing, it became possible to step out and recognize my own nature, to witness my own stumbling, swirling and tumbling-about from event to event.

I have been a Taoist my entire life; however, the ironic twist was I didn't understand the Tao until coming full circle to accept myself first. Over time, I learned to flow with the ups and downs of life, to embrace both the sad and happy moments. This became a lesson: that living itself was a tide of emotions sweeping thru my own blood. Once accepting this ever shifting beat of my nature, it became possible to understand more than myself.

Some points to consider:

- The first step in touching the Tao is very simple: It's accepting we are connected within a larger web of the world.
- Understanding a single thing as an item, as a name is knowledge. Knowledge in this form, as a static definition, will be subjected to the erosion of time.
- Understanding the nature of something is not a matter of knowledge, but a process of embracing and releasing in cycles. The embracing itself is a tidal process, ever the same, yet ever shifting.
- Our understanding is never perfect; it will flow in and out. This is very important; trying to hold on to one single understanding leaves only fossils. Understanding must evolve to change with the meanderings of a life.
- Understanding the larger world begins with flowing with the natural patterns of your own life.

The process of living creates a world of change. Know the Tao, as the tide of tides, unexpectedly shuffles everyone around with change. Hence, a Personal Tao starts with the acceptance of a tidal balance between our inner and outer worlds.

Nature



How Humanity views nature

How Nature views humanity



These images are not about childhood, garbage or society. They're a comparison illuminating the nature of nature. Look closely and discover that the two images are actually the same.

Look again: it's just the perspective that's different. Just as humans clamor over nature as we grow, nature will clamor over us in its growth.

Mother Nature and our nature are each an expression of growth.

Again think of tides, found within this movement of life.

Look at the second picture; it's a wave of leaves crashing upon and over the truck.

Acceptance and Love

dancing around
gentle swaying air
under the sun
a flower
~*
so simple
so complicated deeper
looking ultraviolet
discover faint intricate trceries
new patterns of attraction, landing pads
networks of lives coming, going, feeding into pollination
frenzied frenzied life beats, becoming seeds
waiting towards bursting futures
all this and more...
as
a simple waiting flower

Love
Why does love get placed under a microscope?
It's so tempting
Tasting apple bits, bites, connections, attractions, happenings
rational examinations, complicated dissections
conducted with steel scissors and tools
To place the flower into: a vase
so we can watch it die, in agony

Acceptance and understanding
are not the same thing

let's together stand under
the sun, washing rains
dancing swaying air
accepting our natures
being the flower
*~

===== Thoughts =====

Understanding: a snapshot of knowledge

Acceptance is knowledge that something is as it is, *is as it will be*, **is as it was**,
is is, is, as its nature, not defined by outside observation.

Love is entangling acceptance
Love is acceptance with relationship...
Love, such a dangerous word,
Misused, overloaded, misunderstood, overused, overthrown, head over heels
and over and over, tumbling as so many attempting to force it down,
into a deeply split apart crack within the soul as an ultimate salve.

Love a mixture of actions.

Seemingly so simple, yet so often confused within passion, sex, lust, power,
control, commitment, submission, absolute release, surrendering....

As for some, love does enwrap such various combinations.

Love is an expanding reality: personal in nature; simmering down to the mixing of
needs in “*how*” each of us combines their very essence with the larger world.

Love: the active acceptance of an outside
relationship. The *act of*, the *process involving*,
the *connection* between oneself and another is
love. How do you define love?

This expression of connection: of love → is
vastly unique from person to person. Each
person reaching out to meld themselves into
something that stands more completely to the
larger world. For some this is something dark
indeed, a need to be torn down or to tear down,
as a means to bring up and forth their inner
aspects which need healing. For others, love is a
fulfilling experience in the building upon
positive aspects of themselves. Between these
two extremes of possibility discover the
spectrum of variations through relationships.
It's an ever-shifting experience:

as life bounces against life:
as one love changes another love:
onward and onward
in the interweaving of souls.

Love is the one area of humanity where people
consistently flail in an attempt to find
completeness. So many lonely souls trying to
find refuge in another; when completion must
start within the self first and then grow outward
to the warmth of another.

Some people are earthquakes to the soul
What depth, degree, place
can someone shake you down
tumbling senses
rumbling confusion
to deepest marrow

Some people are wind to the spirit
What height, direction, place
can someone spin you around
lifting you up
easing burdens
to highest points of spirit

No matter what sundering upon an earthquake
No matter how far the wind travels away
Love never leaves
unless love was never there

To love, is sharing of center
Briefly touching that...
Which cannot be described outside the moment
If described fully, not obliquely,
then was it truly love?
Yet, moments move as passing connections
Leaving names piling up as pointless lists...
No list ever gets written upon the soul
yet love is weaved within the soul
Threading our changes within the warp
Leaving it impossible to untangle

So roll into every seismic event
Let the wind and breeze entangle
Embrace earthquakes down to the core
Unearth the depths
Roil, live, breathe within shuddering passions
To the benefit of...
Revealing within love
Tumbling of the senses
Lifting acceptance of the soul

Love should not be confused with the approach taken to find love. Nor should love be thought as a final destination. Rather love is a continuous process, thru which we become a little more than our previous states of being.

Finding true love is not the same as discovering harmony with a Personal Tao.

However, discovering love enables one to access additional resources and perspectives, which in time leads to discovering deeper truths about our own nature.

A personal peace exposes self truth; a personal love exposes truth gained from joining to the outside. The two seem so close that people confuse their search of personal peace with the completion of discovering love. Love is not a way to find self-peace. Remove an object of love, to discover how quickly one loses a personal peace based on such outside connections. Love is a way to discover harmony what is outside oneself.

The importance of love comes from its ability to aid a person to do ever so much more than they could do alone. For these reasons love should be embraced fully and deeply. However, personal peace, as it is personal, must come from the inside of ourselves to be true. Those we love might *help* us find truth in ourselves, yet in the end, embracing the peace of a Personal Tao must in part come from our own inner self.

While discovering love usually will not help a person find a true personal peace, the reverse is often true. Finding a Personal Tao, coming to peace with oneself, permits a person to discover harmony and love much more easily. Usually I find most people look for love first, and then try to find a personal peace. This is the harder path. Why would this be the case? It's the case simply because once you have inner peace; it becomes possible to accept love as a *relationship*. If a person doesn't have personal peace, then much of the energy of love isn't going into a balanced relationship, it's going into shoring up, trying to keep an inner peace alive. This would be a one-sided relationship and often times these relationships burn up.

How often does anyone ever truly teach us how to love? How can it be taught, when love is personal in nature? Our true teachers within love are those who we entwine with love. Teaching is a process of expression found within love itself. By default we teach ourselves much of what we need in love (as we are part of the entwining). If we cannot accept ourselves within love, then we lose half of the equation.

Many people I have watch spend time imitating others and basing love by example. No wonder so much time ends up in the maze of love. Instead of following our nature, we attempt to follow the nature of others. We lose our own nature in the process of pretending to be something we are not.

This also explains another aspect of love; many individuals tend to bounce between love and discovering personal truth. Yet because they don't understand what is happening, it becomes a very drawn-out process of repeating past mistakes as they redefine themselves.

So little
very little
almost nothing
do I truly care about

But of what I do care for:
Love of you, love of family, love of myself
It's my entire world
nothing more

Finding
without your love
I feel as if I were nothing

Is this suffering as Buddhists talk about
Is this agony of hell
¿ Is this sane ?
Is it real
Is this... what is it, to be in love
Wanting to vomit out entire souls

When at times criss crossing
Lover's anger flays indiscriminately about

Doesn't make sense... At all
Love
It's a melding of souls
and at times
ripping of souls

screaming for velcro

In time tearing heals
Makes stronger
The puzzles of who we are
Together

Anyone going through this will understand the *sigh* at this point. Turn the *sigh* into a smile, as we are who we are. It's a process of expanding ever softly outward to joining to a larger world.

To discover love:
Embrace your own nature.
Following needs,
to dispel needs.
Love is always a mixing and matching
to what feels right.

It's self destructive to become someone else in the process of love. Accept your nature and add upon the qualities which reinforce/support your nature.

Love is an important aspect of human life. To reject it, is to reject a part of humanity. The path of love is a way of reaching out to a larger world. Treat the overall process as love, each lover as its own separate lesson and your life will grow accordingly.

So much to say
 Seeking touch
So much to hear
 Seeking convergence

To feel your hand on my face
To feel whispers of a moan
forever spiral within dreams
Yet awakening to discover: dream and reality touching
 to a blurring of one

Briefly... without words,
Lost... within emotions
Smiling knowing your touch indeed
Did make dusty bones spring and grow
As saplings embracing rays of the sun

You touch me in whispers, encased in warmth
Unfurling and growing
I am entranced within your gaze
your eyes saying everything

All memories forever sweetly trapped
within the amber
of embracing gazes

Your giving merely brief seconds
 yet lasting forever within me

Amber within amber
Two saplings reaching, entwining, growing
becoming more beautiful than any poem
I could write for you

Wu-Wei

To anyone looking for this text to rehash many of the basic terms of Taoism, then I suggest be-bopping over to the *expectations* section.

No one person can know or represent the vast amounts of literature covering Taoism. Attempting to do so is counter-productive to accepting the Tao. As a result the core version of this book does not discuss directly the Yin and Yang, Chi, Wu-Wei, Xing or ten thousand other possible Taoist topics. Very few direct references to traditional Taoist terms are used in this book. Spending energy to associate old names and trying to understand how it all relates would make the “**process**” of learning more important than just relaxing and being yourself.

To some: this approach will be an incentive to explore the additional wonders of the older texts. For others: this style will make the discovery of the Tao a very simple process.

Taoism has no requirements of degrees, exceptional backgrounds or previous knowledge.

Touching the Tao takes only a single breath.

Learning the Tao is simply

Cutting free
moving
To where heart
To where spirit

may grow

p.s.

Nothing is ever missing

===== Finding Answers =====

Between here and there in time, in the about now, it becomes time to answer the questions about Taoist terms such as Wu-Wei.

Since when does the world flow according to our statements of fact?

Wu-Wei means “*not doing*”, means “*action thru inaction*”, means “*Spontaneity*”, means “*action without directed intention*”, means... I have read pages upon pages on what Wu-Wei means, what it might mean, how the meaning varies upon scholar or parrot,

and...

Now know...

Moving backwards

... it means: **nothing**.

Now after telling you,

other questions pop up: “*how does that relate to Tao?*”, “*how do I not act, and get something done?*”, and, and... And questions upon questions then pile up, each question taking a person one additional question further away from understanding the Tao.

Re-wind time: if I don’t define Wu-Wei, the reverse happens, bringing it all one step closer as the directed action has been removed. Instead within this ongoing gradual conversation between you and I, spread across the pages is a more natural way of discovering Wu-Wei; as in reality, Wu-Wei is weaved throughout the entire book.

Hence by the end of the book you will fully understand Wu-Wei without having to know its Wu-Wei¹ and to the Taoist that’s the ultimate in Wu-Wei.

(1) It makes sense as when you stop trying, becomes the point Wu-Wei kicks in and everything typically comes together as if it all were planned, yet the only planning is common sense .

Smiles

Spin on a dancing atom
Dare to split reality

Cut between / slash trash dash all perceptions you might have \ here and now

Be a superhero
Just by reaching out
By
Looking into sullen eyes
Tipping a hat
Moving along
Helping someone

To...
smile
As in
once upon a time

I was walking in Harlem, in desperate need
not knowing the dangers upon my soul

She swooped down from nowhere.
Well she was really merely passing by...
Another unknown spirit reached out
She touched out in saying: "Smile Damn-It Smile"
Then she continued to pass on by

Leaving me so shocked as to open my smile

Time passes time
Never saw her again
Yet in time,
forever she is with me
forever sharing a smile
She saved a life
with a brash 5 New York seconds
in "Smile Damn-It Smile"

To be a superhero all it takes is...

Reaching out... finding we are all: < together >
No matter how far ---- apart ---- we seem
At some point it is always possible
to -->touch|hcuot<-- ot
to --> help|pleh <-- ot
If you are only willing to try...
All it takes is...

A most simple enlightenment
...enlivened by a smile...

===== Thoughts =====

A smile is acceptance, a joining with something larger than oneself.

A frown is rejection, a lessening of self for countless emptying reasons.

Look at Chinese yoga and discover part of the practice of the exercise is to smile.

===== Paths =====

In dark times a smile can lift a person to feel the light. A smile is a window to let the outer world into our hidden inner worlds. Or at times to let our own inner light shine onto someone else.

It works both ways: reaching out to help lift another with a smile can reflect back to ourselves in a balancing, uplifting way. For this reason, when most depressed I will at times try to make someone else smile.

Why a poem?
There is no why
when you weave words
to make another person smile

I write these words
as a smile, since at times
we all need a random smile

Smile with these thoughts
Let your day be wonderful
as you move from moment to moment
Because at
the strangest times
you will remember
this silly poem and you will smile :)

And that is what this poem
is all about :)



1) Of course at times, at times it pays to be grumpy.

Snapshots

As we explore life, it's easy to be distracted by the obvious, while only catching glimpses of the shadows and reflections we cast, missing the larger patterns in which we participate. We might appear as a human body and mind, but a greater form extends out as a larger reality. Take the time to stop → examine a reflection → trace back a shadow → reach to touch the world as the day's surf shuffles everything around our path.



Mind, body, spirit and so much more hidden in our unrealized reflections & shadows. As example: in Norse knowledge, our physical body and mind are very small parts of a larger complex in each single life.

Soul (sal): represents the results of our lives which touch both others and the world after we leave. A soul would be a footprint in the sand, left behind, that still influences the world.

Mind (hugr, minni, odhr, ek) : The mind isn't a single entity but rather a combination of several distinct elements of memory, reason, ecstasy, and self.

Fetch: The union of our opposites in the world, as well as a touching to our personal godheads.

Body: (hamr, lik): Actually 3 elements of a shape, appearance & a physical body.

Spirit: (ond): The vital breath of life. Another term would be Indian "Prana".

Hamingja: The overall power of our life.

I bring up the Norse example for two reasons. First, it illustrates how other cultures have a rich and complex view of a person's existence beyond just a mind running a body. I believe that modern western society, in an over-reliance of reason and material strength, has lost touch to the more subtle and hidden aspects of humanity. Many cultures have rich, deep traditional wisdom gathered upon human nature that doesn't appear in the general western culture of 2005. Secondly, I want to tease you to explore your own nature from another cultural viewpoint. I could not within this book begin to list all the important ideas from Indian, Norse, Aboriginal or any of the thousand other cultures around the world. Yet it is possible to discover more of one's self by learning¹ an alternative cultural understanding of humanity.

1) Learning from another culture has the strength of removing many assumptions we inherit from our default culture. It's hard to leave the comfort of what is known, yet doing so increases many fold what can be learned thru new perspectives. Many amazing figures in history (Gandhi, Attila the Hun, Moses, etc) are those who have been raised cross-culturally. An incredible strength of presence can be achieved in this path.

Land, Wellsprings, Layers





Ravines interlacing this canyon
Curves of land
Curves seemingly as a pregnant mother
Her body grounded against sharp broken rocks
Scattered drops of erosion
Amidst a geologic storm of tumbling stone

Ridges outlined by occasional lone pine
Lines of sediment
Lines of aging mother nature
Her body exposed, deeply
thru the layers
Revealing years of past times

Land covered over with old growth
Buffeted yellow straw grass
Skeletal reminders of summer gold
Leaving expelled ghosts of seeds
Gone into ground for spring

Standing here leaves one strangely out of body

This place resists the intrusion
Wind peeling past as
Intense invisible icicles on the skin
Numbing one down, pushing one on
---to move with the sounds ---
roaring gently into the distance

Is this the sound of wind
or river from below?

Becoming inconsequential as each belongs to movement
Which takes all back to time
Whether of land, stone, grass or body
As time always comes, eventually to move us each on by



===== Side Excursions =====

Like the land, this section only shows a surface of a topic. To move in pace with the geology of our life, we need to let time erode deeper aspects of our hidden self into view. Personal knowledge, discovery, self revelations: each comes in stages, exposed by the whims of the wind of passing happenstance.

Rules

Living to rules.
Living to a heart beat. Living to a breath. Living to our inner nature.
Rules
Society piles rules, rules upon rules to live by.
The rules of society are not the rules of living
Despite society's unwritten rule declaring you must believe otherwise
Society is not nature
Society is human nature
Our actions declare the rules of society
Not the other way around

Which side will you choose?

Debate, musing, arguing fine points
Paralysis from Legal fine print...
Drafted to fight someone else's war
Homes built as iron maidens of propriety
Fences defining good neighbors

A nap in the grass under the sun

Talk or Action

Sides?

There are no sides to choose from!

Sides are built out of social rules used within lines of control.

Just be yourself,
Discover there are no sides
Rules pretend to be walls
 A convenient place to perch at times,
 to watch the craziness of the society from.
 A place to hide behind when not wanting to be noticed
Rules are illusions;
Be careful of the arbitrary ways people inflict their rules.

A Taoist's path walks thru rules while breaking none
A Taoist is true to the heart, free-flowing within a life without walls

Practices

Now repeat after me,
Repeat a thousand times the following exercise. Say it out loud:
“Remember *practice* makes perfect”...

Ahhh. That’s a clue: “Perfection”

Do we practice something in order to become perfect? Wow, now that’s something to consider isn’t it? Consider the desire people have to reach perfection, the absolute dedication that some people show in the practicing of a talent to achieve perfection.

Perfection is boring.

The secret to a practice is achieving a balance. Now mix in the mistaken belief that achieving perfection also will be a balanced state. Perfection is a very fleeting achievement: once a person practices their way to the top, nature and society practices kicking them back down.

Balance is challenging.

In Taoism, the goal isn’t a practice to achieve mastery. Taoism instead concentrates upon a personal set of practices which together move with harmony to achieve balance within a person’s life. This is a fine difference. Western culture is most definitely into being the best. Being the best is all about practice. Taoism is about balance. Learning balance often comes from a practice teaching stability. Being the best isn’t a very stable position to be within, as the process of becoming the best tends to come at the price of limiting personal development of other important traits.

I have a personal mantra that we are a balance of Body, Mind and Spirit. But I also believe we are actually more than this trinity. For practical purposes summarizing it as Body, Mind and Spirit helps make it easier to maintain a balanced lifestyle. This translates to a set of practices which aid in maintaining a Personal Tao. Typically these practices are a combination of activities which support the Body, Mind and Spirit equally.

A Personal Tao is not a set of practices you maintain. A healthy set of practices are merely activities a person uses to focus / flow smoothly to their own nature. The two are related, but practices are not required to achieve or find a Personal Tao. Practices are a very important tool for a Taoist to use, yet too much reliance on a single practice will at times blind a person to discovering their Personal Tao. A hammer is an awesome tool, but you can’t work with screws very well with a hammer. Likewise, a Taoist will meditate to open up an inner eye, but you still need your normal physical senses to interact with the world.

My personal practice seems simple to me, as it's something that has evolved over many years. Anyone else looking at my practice would be confused by the seemingly random way I skip between my activities: Poetry, massage (giving and receiving), Jujutsu, Yoga (3 different styles), Patterning¹, Wandering, Mediation, Love, Pastel Drawing, Dancing, Reading, Day Dreaming, Chi-Gung² and finally Listening. I have only really mastered three of these practices and within the rest I am just a novice or have only a very basic level of skill. The goal³ isn't to become a master. The goal is to flow with needs of life. If my body is feeling out of shape, I ramp up the Yoga and Jujutsu. If my body is extra sore I get some massage. If I can't stop thinking, then I write poetry or meditate. If I have an excess of positive energy "Chi" then I will help heal someone by giving a massage or perform some patterning. As the real world interferes unexpectedly every day, it means having access to a range of different activities permitting flexibility by matching a practice to my current needs.

I had no plan to learn so many different skills. Instead, over time, one skill led to another. Life kept introducing new skills due to traveling, having to balance work situations, or just sharing life experiences with other people. Interestingly enough, each practice in itself led to other practices. So the process of learning rapidly expands out in time. A person may only have a few skills until reaching a critical point and it all suddenly flashes over into many new areas at once.

===== Paths =====

Taoists take a "buffet" approach to living a practical lifestyle. Typically a Taoist will explore and try many different practices. Over time a collection of tools and ideas are gathered to keep everything exercised and in shape. There isn't a rush to learn something new: instead we learn practices that fit with both our personal style and needs.

As our bodies, mind and spirit change over time, these practices also flow and change over time for an individual.

- 1) Patterning is a term I coined for describing the practice of using a combination of patterns found in our lives to help unlock truth or ideas. Many different types of patterning exist. For example: Psychology is a form of patterning base on human mental processes. Feng Shui is patterning base on human nature, artistry and older lore. Divination is another form of patterning using I-Ching, Tarot cards or Rune stones to predict possible future events. I developed the term patterning as I discovered that my patterning practice combines aspects of each of these different forms of traditional systems into a newer and more comprehensive system. I needed a more generic name, which didn't get tied down to preconceptions of a single existing practice.
- 2) I highly recommend the spin-cycle-washing-machine-slap-your-kidneys movement in Chi-Gung. (Ok, I have no idea of the movement's name, but it feels damn good. You learn so many things across the various practices: like how working your kidneys and liver with certain movements aids in solving allergy issues. This in turn helps relieve the stress on the body, which in turn helps reach a moment of peace, which in turn relaxes you to a point of realization of "hey I like this path I am living" which in turn helps a person discover a Personal Tao, rather than being in fight for survival mode as the allergies won't let me sleep, which interferes.... anyway, you can continue the runon sentences with examples from your life.
- 3) The goal is never a goal; the purpose of any practice is supporting your essence with tools fitting the needs of the moment.

Dance

Would you like to dance?
Dance not with swirling feet...
 But in dazzling words
Would you like to dance under the stars?
Not hidden by the clouds...
 But shining in our dreams.

Waking

A window
Sarong draped across
Air slips, flutters into the room
Cool cool air slinking around
Mixing into breath
Coolness merging into
Morning

Light filters thru
Green, purple, blue fabric
Playing across, stirring into first sight
Coolness of colors merging to
Day, waking, becoming...
Alive once again

Are we always alive?
Or is it an inspiration, upon each waking
Each day
A Doorway

===== Thoughts =====

Every morning, every waking, is a new birth into our selves. Yet, so many chains, chains of our own making, limit what we *think* is possible. These chains are forged from a desire to simplify everything to binary rules (*yes/no, black/white, good/bad*) or by limiting life to definable labels.

Taoism offers a third path.

It's the option

to be yourself,
to toss away irrelevant questions,
to change rules as rules are arbitrary,
to discover color after seeing everything in black or white.

Physics shows us an object is there or not there... or when not measured the object is indeterminate, as it could be in any state. Taoism adds the extra option that the measured state of our life doesn't matter. **What we are** is always a choice on how we meander into the future.

Every day just before waking our life is indeterminate. Instead of measuring life against the morning light, open up the day to the possibility you are free to become what you aspire to be.

Depression is when the fire dims within life. It is a calling to join back with the universe. Everyone merges into the earth. Mother earth will merge back into the stars. At some point the stars tumble down, exploding into stardust that someday again merges into something new. Knowing this cycle of change, Taoism reminds me that life is a haven and time to be brightly alive. As a Taoist I have embraced depression to experience it, yet Taoism also gives a perspective to live thru the worst times of my depression.

Years ago I wondered why Jung and Freud explored spiritualism. Ten years later I came to an understanding that our consciousness comes out of the movement of our spirit. For instance, performing Yoga and Jujutsu both enliven the body which then stokes up the spirit to brightly burn depression away. Writing, laughing or perking the mind, has similar effects to dispel the depression. Anything that affects the spirit directly impacts our minds, our bodies, the very way we flow thru life. These relationships are related and mutual.

A few times when my spiritual spark has been the dimmest I have considered ending my life. Once after work, while driving home, I had a thought that it would be so much easier to slam the car at 80 miles per hour into the highway wall. It would have been a quick and simple death. Yet, at that moment Taoist beliefs kicked in and I shook my head realizing: if things were that bad I could just walk away from the problem. The next morning I started the process to close down the work project I was on. Then each day, in a journey seven years long, I moved each morning into a new life. It was a process of weaving seven years of aspirations and dozens of distinct changes together as a whole to recreate myself. Yes, it would have been quicker and easier to end my life, a matter of mere seconds as compared to seven years, but my life will end eventually so why rush into it? I look forward to the time when I will fade. However, until then, I enjoy life, hug the sadness, celebrate the happiness, circle and embrace all aspects of being alive.

At the moment of this story, the choice to walk away was the harder decision over staying on a path of life that was diminishing me. This now brings up an interesting point in Taoism. Some people think that to go with the flow, to be with the Tao, is to do what is easiest.

***To go with the flow doesn't mean to do what is easiest;
it means to be true to your nature.***

We often have to deal with rough times and a more difficult path to be true to our nature.

Hanging on
to that which is right
at the price of life
cannot truly be right

A choice in paths

To cut free and move
to where heart
to where spirit
may grow

or

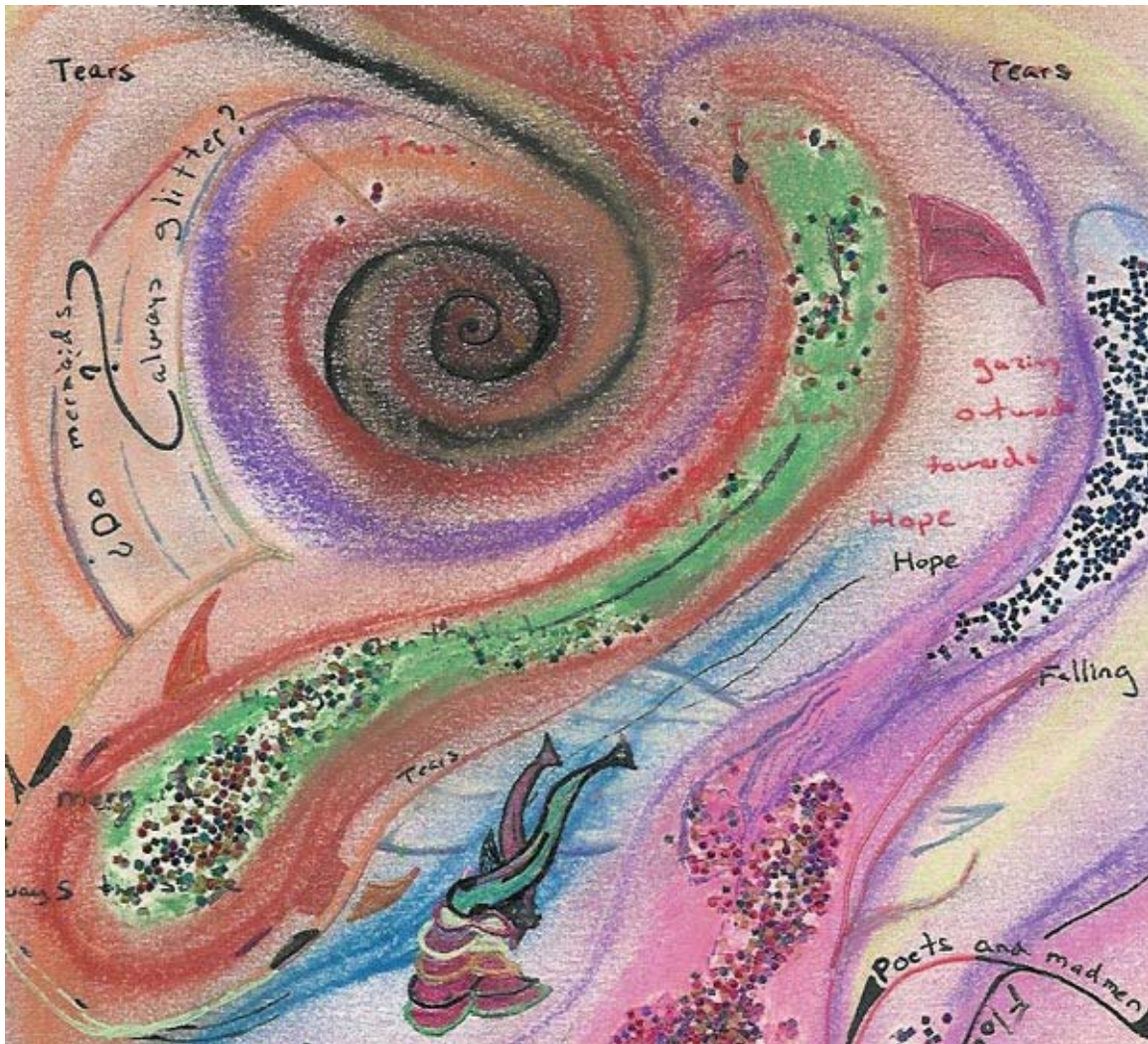
To dangle feeling
last kisses of the wind
upon swinging toes
wrapped around a fading sigh.

My choice has always been: life

Moving on is true when it is in sync with the movement of your spirit's spark¹. This is the Personal Tao of life which keeps us true to our own nature. Why speed life along by killing yourself off with bad life habits? No need exists to express-lane the blood flow with a knife to the wrist. I know I am not going anywhere afterwards except back into my own expression of life. I am always within my own Personal Tao. Yet my fire, my spirit to be alive, means exploring fully the entirety of each breath. Ending my fire prematurely won't even lessen the depression; as life, soul and the expression of spirit are eternal.

- 1) Be careful not to confuse someone else's movement to be direction of your own spirit. This mistake at times can be a deadly trap leading your spirit to move against your true nature.

Poets, Madmen and Fear



Is it Madness

Expressing yourself truly? or Hiding from what others think?

It is madness to live in fear
It is de-humanizing to be ruled by fear.

Living to fear means not living as yourself.

How can a person discover a Personal Tao if they cannot be themselves?

Work

go march beat
to work ... to timing ... to industry...
Orders, Tasks, Working

For others, to others, as others
Clamor forward in demand, quotas to complete
People presiding to the beat of quotas
Each and every person a drum
Sounding to rapid fire consumption
everyone the same drum, trying to be unique
Buying into uniqueness of sameness
in mass produced colorful tidbits
It's economic growth, expanding
Building every desire – duplicating
again and again and again and again
carbon dazed dizzy copies
Industrial fruit of the loins
Overflowing as rubber chickens in every pot
Leaving us dying upon diets of more, ever more plastic

a-washed over by peacock worker bots
only the drab raven stands out

Ask about caring
in-moving in-difference in-pushing towards
day's end, to earning yet some more cash
not cash, but blood, our blood
blood type denominations of 10's and 50's
This isn't about being a worker
It's about life, working to live

So, why don't we live while we work?

Unexpectedly this is a story, a whole story of the workers.
We are all authors collaborating a work of Shakespeare made from 6 billion random people.
Repeating another monkey-slapped-typed mundane job well done.

Amid raucous peacocks
A black feather raven shall become king
That too is just a job

===== Thoughts =====

Working as a Taoist in the United States has been a challenge. At first, I went with the flow: practicing and living what would have been labeled an ideal lifestyle as shown thru parents, friends, the educational system and general culture. In doing this I have come out with various insights and experiences. The interesting thing: while I still am considered to be "one of the productive" workers of the United States; I have also rejected much of the work ethic of the United States, working instead to a style and manner which is compatible with my own nature.

The work environment within the United States is geared to work the person as a unit of output. Humanity only comes into the equation as companies have to treat workers well enough to be productive over an acceptable, economical period of time. The rest of our humanity gets removed for sake of equality and efficiency. Business is an equation, having been summarized in the calculus of corporate efficiency. Strangely, while people spend so much time at work in the United States, workers subconsciously try to integrate aspects of their traditional family and spiritual aspects into the workplace. This combination places a person in a position which is de-humanizing, and which often-times wipes out a spiritual and family life. When faced with this prospect, is it any wonder people are attempting to reject the so called modern work environment?

The dilemma becomes: how does a person support themselves and family, and stay true to personal human values/needs while working in environments that strip them of those values? Many angles exist to this larger topic. This section will only choose one angle for review: How people define their personal nature to work itself.

Two questions: Listen carefully for the difference:

Question 1: What do you do?

Question 2: What do you do?

To most people these questions are the same. For instance: I can answer to question one:

What do you do? I am an author.

Compared to the vastly different question:

What do you do? I am a poet

Seemingly the difference is the answer, yet no, the basic difference is in the two questions: The first question asks a person what is their job, the second question asks how one lives life.

An author is a predefined entity, who writes to earn cash, with all sorts of job-related issues of publishing, royalties and other such yada. An “author” is a job. It’s about cash flow.

A “poet” refers to a life style. A poet lives in happiness & sadness, mixes & explores the world thru living and at times expresses commentary within poetry as an attempt to understand the daily grind of what is called life. Being a poet is not about the cash, as much as about experiencing life.

This distinction is very important. Defining a person as job will end up defining that person’s life as the job. This is the ultimate in de-humanization, I am not a person. Nope! I am a programmer: all I do and **will** do suddenly gets forced by that one statement.

Many very basic examples exist of this defining of our nature to a job. Look at the many generations of last names carrying a tradition in labeling people to their work. Smith, Carpenter, Koch (cook), Mason. Showing this is something which isn't unique to the modern age. While last names rarely shift much today (children aren't labeled John Programmer) identifications to work still happen at the earliest ages: "Oh, you want to be a Doctor when you grow up!"

People tend to automatically identify themselves to a job.

What do you do?

I am an electronic radiation shielding specialist, hair beautician.

Of course this is logical, as on average a person spends more time at work than even with family. Work is a very important aspect of human society, and always has been. Nothing new here except the refinement of the high art of modern business economics.

Where does this leave us?

First and foremost, let's go back to the two questions: What do you do? This should be truly two separate questions: 1) What trade do you perform, and 2) Who are you. Western culture merges the questions together. The "who are you" question tends to get dropped as knowing our nature typically takes a lifetime in learning. It's easier just to label oneself as a "Job" and not worry about life's trickier and often unanswerable questions in small talk.

It's very important to untangle these questions with a change in understanding.

We are not a job! Work is performed as a method to survive in society. Now here is the change in understanding: A wise man once taught me sometimes you just need to change the question you are answering. In this case the question should be shifted to:

Why do we work?

The main reasons to list could be the following

For survival
For consuming
For serving
For passion/belief
For the work itself

While no classification is perfect or will cover all possibilities. These five categories are an excellent starting point to help understand the relationship between ourselves and the reason for working. In exploring these with friends, an interesting fact became clear: when people work for reasons that matched their nature, they tended to be content. When people work for reasons against their nature, they tended to be discontent. The job itself wasn't as important as the reasons for working.

A few examples:

- If a person is a true consumer, who enjoys living life as an expression of consumption, then a person's job should be geared to support consumption. If you live to ski, then work in such a way so you can ski. Nothing is inherently wrong in being a consumer, life is a fire, we burn to live, we consume, and it's a natural state. Of course consumption has limits, so a balance needs to exist lest we turn the planet and ourselves to ash, but life is as we live it.
- Some people don't like to work, they only work to survive. These individuals, to be happy, will work just enough to cover what they consider basic needs and then live appropriately for their survival.
- A more direct example from my life: I know many social workers with a passion to help addicts recover from drugs. Without the passion to help others, this job would burn out most people in the first month.

All this might seem terribly basic. However, how often is the question seriously posed, "Why do I work?" with an attempt to then try to find a balance between the job and life. Usually people are chasing dollars or expectations of rewards. Or more tragically and universally true: they need to take any job possible as they are starving, supporting a family and have no outside support. Yet know, understanding why we work is more important than the job choice itself. Once we understand our nature, in why we work, then it becomes much easier to find work, a job, which fits your lifestyle and needs. Of course when people are taught to think the job is more important than the reason for work, then people will cling to or be attracted to jobs which will continually cause discontentment, as they will be working cross purposes to their own needs.

The point simmers down to: people are not a job. We have lives and work is an important aspect of life. Yet work and life shouldn't be thought as meaning the same thing. Attempting to separate our identities and work can be very complicated, since the two can become very entangled in day to day life. To help find answers it becomes necessary to change the question slightly to first understand why you work. Once understanding why you work, it becomes possible to balance work and lifestyle in a more acceptable nature.

===== Paths =====

To work as a Taoist means to live fully as a person. To work means working to your nature, to support your nature.

Part of the problem is we think a job is a path to walk down in life. Work is not a path. The actual path is living life. Work is merely an activity within life. The second someone substitutes "a path of living" to be "a career path", often becomes the moment of ~~birth~~ *creation* of a cog in the uncaring machinery of a working society.

Are we a job or are we living humans? We are always the latter, work is always an activity to support our lives. This is one key to finding a balance in work and life.

===== Pondering Area for Frustrated Workers =====

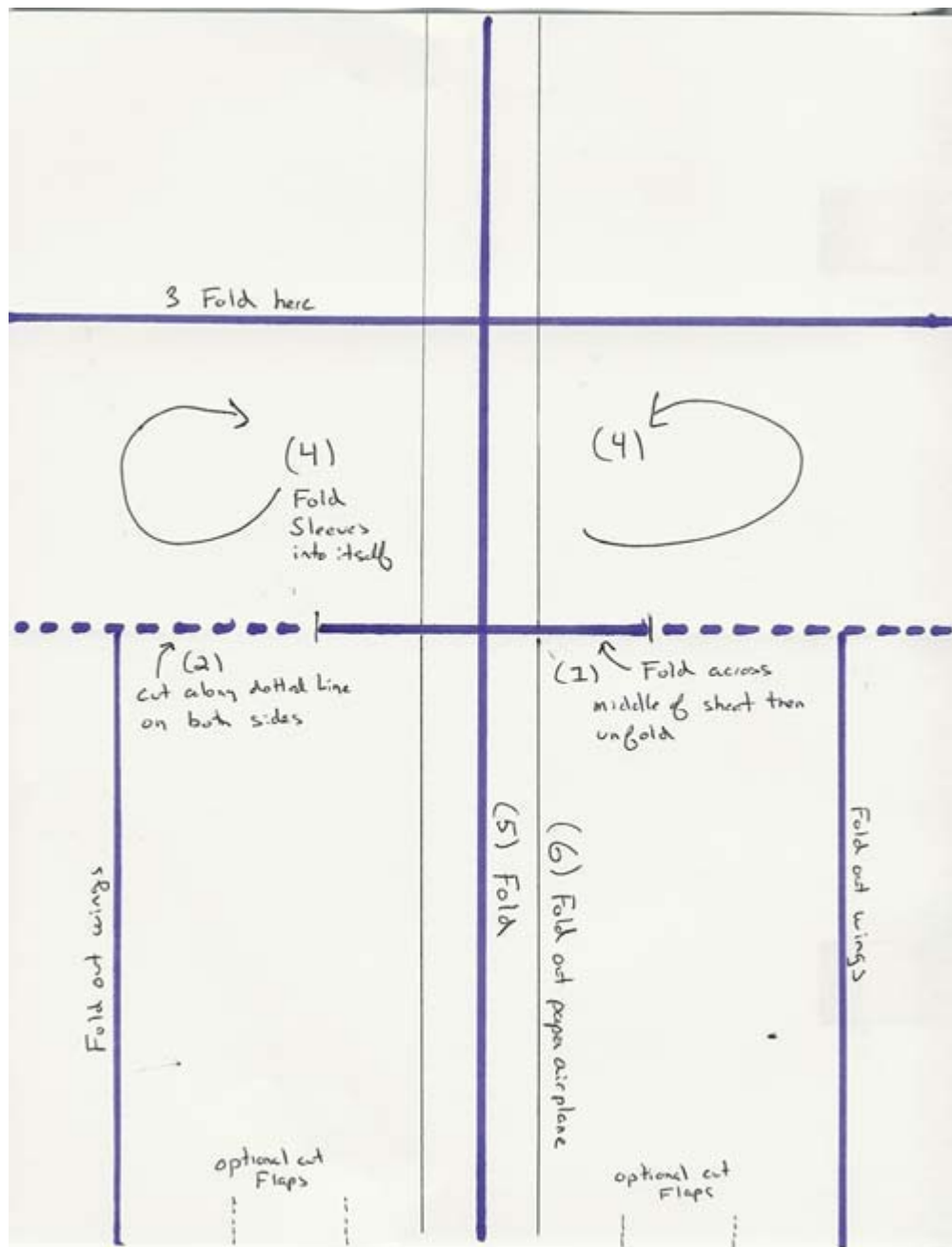
Why do you work?

Go ahead list the reasons here

What is important for your own expression of your own humanity?

Don't worry about connecting the two questions here. Just let the two different questions simmer after writing down initial answers. Opportunities typically present themselves, provided a person opens their awareness to the larger world while beginning the process of understanding their nature.

Paper Airplanes



Once, back in 1985, I was an engineering student. For some odd reason I wanted to design the perfect paper airplane. I did just that¹. Perhaps someone else has built the same paper airplane, I don't know. I just know that in 1985 a single design of mine summarized all the concepts which were learned over 21 years of living. The important aspect of the experience was the need to express creativity, like a poem, except within the physical folding of paper.

1) Perfect is a relative term: as I haven't needed to design another paper airplane, I consider it perfect for my needs.

I knew the proper design needed to have balance, for a key in flight is weight distribution. The other point was it had to be simple, no glue, no staples; I wanted the plane to be only a sheet of paper along with basic cuts.

The first thing I discovered was that a plane might work fine inside, but outside, in the winds, most designs failed. Our minds make a good initial test bench, a safe walled room makes a good stepping stone, yet, in the end, you need to throw something into the larger world to discover how well it works. I would test in my room, and then once that worked, I would take test planes to the top of a ten story building I lived within, and throw it off the roof. So for 3 nights I folded and folded and folded, until the third night, I came across this most elegant design.

It's supremely simple. It has a blunt nose, so you can reuse it over and over; as it doesn't get damaged upon a crash or slamming into the wall. If you cut wing flaps it becomes a stunt plane. If you leave it with no flaps, it will fly smoothly like a ripple over a calm pond.

The night of testing, I took it to the roof. On the first throw, it floated, smoothly went straight, and forward, and forward, getting smaller, and smaller, never losing height. It flew until I lost it in the darkness, long out of my vision. Perhaps it is still flying today. I have this wonderful memory, of a paper airplane floating out → out → out... over Riverside park, slowly fading into the unknown darkness of night. The moment was perfect, breathless in unfolding of amazement as the plane flew out of sight.

Over my life, I have had similar experiences, people slowly leaving out of my life, events moving into distant points. Like my paper airplane; events, other lives and endeavors coming into focus and then later moving out into the distance to be gone.

Funny thing, that paper airplane and myself are still on the roof, and indeed it is still flying, still floating high over Riverside Park.

===== Paths =====

Moving on often means letting go, watching what was in our lives move on
to its own destiny without us.

Zen Gardens



Discovering life is not
a word, a paragraph, nor historical footnote

Above, behind
A spider, web, strands
She rides high above
Seemingly part of sky





Life is deep
Diving into the world
Divining beats of truth amidst
Footfalls, heart, song
Turning stones to reveal springs
I unfold from inner wellsprings of the soul.
Discovering who I am, is more than what I say
Stepping out to ...

Life...



Swirling

some days are a blur

some times I am a blur

all the time

all the same

all a blur

bblluurrriyy eyed me

Swirl what is swirl?

Swirl is a state of ...

Feeling the wind, the sun on your skin ~
~ taking the moment ~
~ as eyes close to soak feelings ~

Skipping for no reason... (Well I skip to feel flight)

Long breaths of expression from inside out

Making someone laugh

Acting to whim, to dreams

Within a plan

That can freely shift

Personally for myself “to Swirl” is my Personal Tao

The world is merely the world

I am merely human, gently passing others

In passing, imparting momentum, helping a world to spin

Each person is their own prayer wheel: Swirling ourselves to being alive.

A Job to be Done

Coal mines
harshness
broken bones of those before me
 of those working
 underneath

Taking the raw energy
Infusing the coal
with the miners raw energy
which burns

Living in coal mines
---- of my mind ----
Living in jobs
This is a coal mind
Breathing industrial fallout
of our own labor
keeping us in labor
which burns

Whether working in deep mines or your own mind, avoid burning away as meaningless labor. Burn as an engaging flame of life: even when toiling. Living doesn't stop with a job; living stops when you accept labor as being meaningless.

----- Looking from another angle-----

A person can work having their labor taken away,
so the world can burn brightly.

--- or ---

A person can work and assume their labor,
to personally burn brightly.

It's the same job both times, yet the result ends up being vastly different depending on the rules and viewpoint of the person in charge.

Taoism drifts towards the third path:

Just be yourself

At times, work can become meaningless, repetitive or empty. When this happens make it something different: At this point, it can become a mantra to aid the process of reflection.

To illustrate this: Once my job had become dismal and the general attitudes of co-workers desperate (some were literally in tears over the daily problems). The experience crescendo-ing into my nearly resigning at exactly 1:12 pm in the afternoon. My mind switched into a calmer mood, pushed over a boundary, thinking about leaving a job, doing the math of all the debts and responsibilities, accepting that tomorrow I would deal with each problem, one at a time, to rebuild a new life. While starting to write a resignation letter, something else filled my mind. In that moment, I happened to look out of the 11th floor window: everything was crisper, the buildings in the view appeared as if each were a stone. The buildings moonlighting as black mountains, outlining an empty space 3 city blocks in size. In that moment, a seagull drifted thru the empty space between the manmade stone-skyscrapers. The bird flew in curves, defined by invisible hills and valleys of wind and air. The bird knew this terrain, its flight thru, illuminated an entire empty space, showing me something as a man myself I could only feel in sharing with a seagull. In that moment, the entire space became a Zen Garden, illuminating the empty space of my own personal frustration with a job. The stones of skyscrapers, a pebble of a bird, the lines of flight, the simplicity of a vista... left me at one with the whole moment. I didn't leave the job, as any other corporate job would have been the same, but within this job I had found, within a most crazy situation, a time of reflection and peace in a personal Zen garden which had manifested itself.

Now this last paragraph reads as rambling run on sentence. ***Shift the experience. Change the angle by reading it out loud as a story.*** A simple shift in approach modifies everything. Similarly simple alterations in work style can change a long tedious job into a poetic experience (- to a point -).

Life and work aren't packaged in neat sentences; they run on for us to experience.

Many monasteries use hard repetitive work, such as constant cleaning and maintenance of the monastery, as a form of meditation. A job doesn't have to be just a job. It can be the source of more than just cash if we are willing to be awake to other possibilities. Even the most mundane job can open realizations within ourselves. The key isn't to lose our personal identity to the control of something else!

I have a goal to help meld the spiritual practice of meditation within the western work environment. At times all jobs are empty, hard, boring or meaningless → Yet with a slight shift of the mind, the same emptiness can illuminate a whole new vista of self discovery.

A Paper Spittoon

This is a holding area for items removed from other areas of the book. These items are kept here until another point of time when it feels right to expand or merge them into something more complete.

These are raw and unedited...seeds for future writings. If something catches your eye, expand it or maybe add something of your own. Comment on images that these ideas bring forth...

Impossibility

Adults rarely test reality. How often do you try to do things which are impossible? Everyday I still try to fly, walk thru walls, teleport or some other whim which tests the universe. Children do this all the time. Yet so many adults lose this trait. If you try the impossible on a frequent basis, then consider your fortune as being pretty unique. In my informal survey of asking people, I found it to be a rare trait outside of artists, madmen and children.

A Conversation with Julie

Is it easier to destroy than to create? Yes, but why? I believe it has to do with the combination of data, required materials and required patterns to establish something. In thought, it layers down as:

- It's easiest to do nothing
- Next easiest just go with the flow
- Then to destroy
- Then to create

8/10/2005

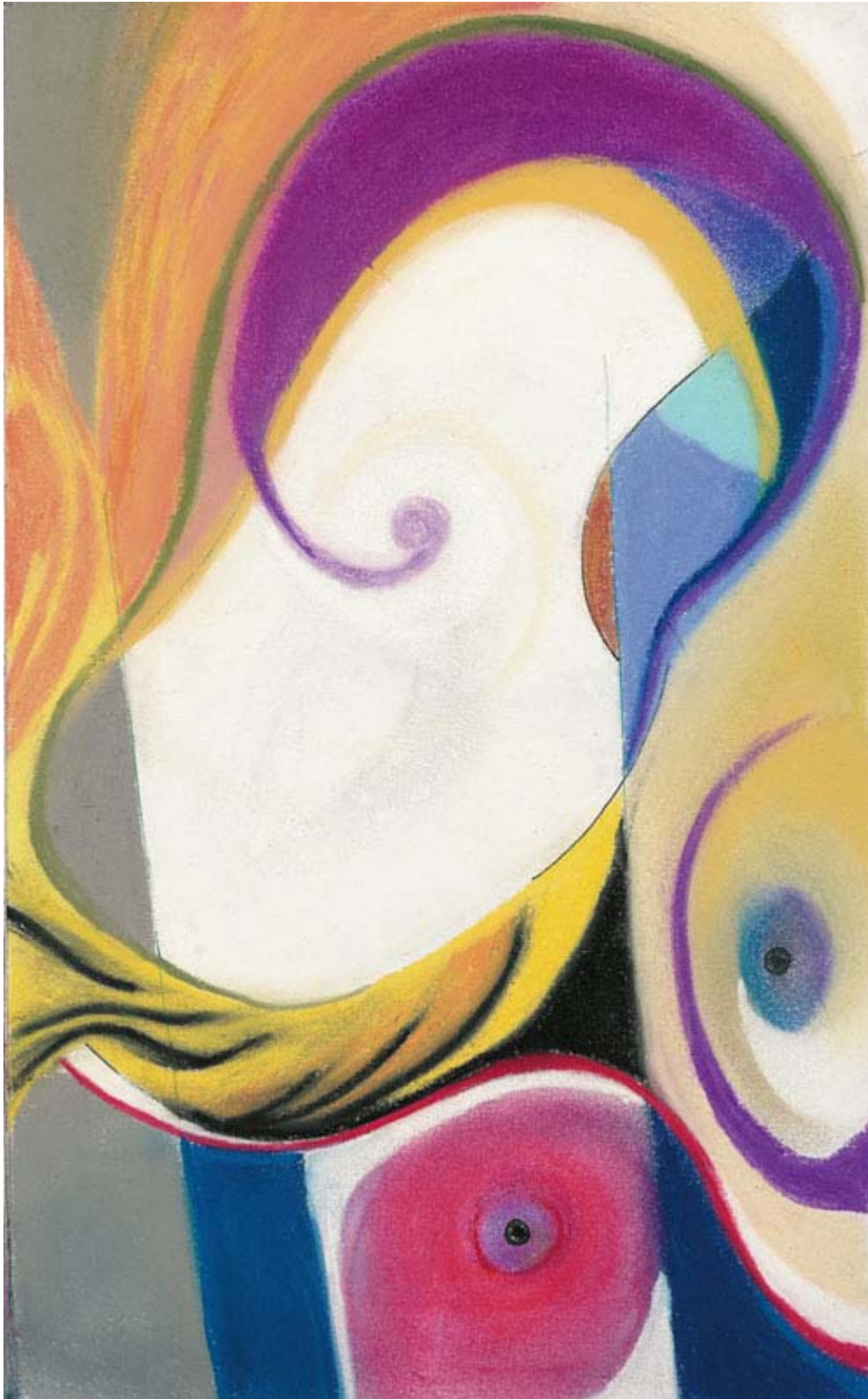
This question was posed within the Google group "Minds Eye". Within this conversation I liked the conclusion that creation and destruction are the same thing: change. To create is to also destroy, and conversely to destroy was to create.

Word Math

Written language is a powerful / useful tool. Words are useful in the same manner that physics uses math to model the universe. However, both words and math are only abstract modeling mediums.

Language permits the binding of a community in the present time. Written language connects a community across the past into the future, in a stronger fashion.

Portraits



The empty mind

Performing magic is to fill in... the empty spaces.

A waste of time

“A waste of time” is an interesting statement. If life is time, then to waste time is to waste life. But if life is eternal, then we can never truly waste time. More interestingly: the saying “time is money”. If again life is time, seemingly the economic systems can then place a value upon life down to the seconds we live. But if life is eternal, then a second becomes valueless amid the eternity of our life. If people were to accept their eternal nature, it could collapse the entire modern world economic structure! Shhhhh, don’t tell anyone! I don’t want the World Bank boycotting this book. I need the revenue ;^) to buy me some of those seconds they are trying to sell me.

Words

Words are shallow.

Orality: Morality without the 'm',
Speaking out human nature.

It's too easy, to become a preacher.

This in any style: Poetry, street savior, sermons
Becomes a hollow sound: The classic noise of one hand
slapping another person down

Walking

Ever watch people walk? I am sitting in the café right now, watching:

- Striding laid back, kawl to an angle
- Stiff, pulling each leg forward
- Plodding
- As if he owned the ground
- As if she owned him
- In-different
- Bouncing
- Heavy steps pounding into the ground the bad day
- Planting heels, one heel at a time to step ahead

So much of who we are projects forth in our walking.

Mind Body Spirit

A balance in a physical practice is important. I wonder if acting outside of our nature, is partially responsible for causing feelings of dimming / depression to occur?

Actions

We can't always have a teacher, or guide.

So don't wait or hesitate; when something feels right, move to it, explore, make mistakes and grow.

Trees grow strong in the wind, and weak with inaction.

Reflections of Ourselves In the World at Large

The world is not
Fair, moral, just, any other human value
The world is just the world

Consciousness

Consciousness is time, is the spark of life that flows thru a person's overall existence.

Permissions

Even if you don't own this book, freely write within

The Sage

Speaking out
the tree was talking
 in the voice of a hundred starlings
the tree was chanting
 in hush de-ter-mine-rince of the wind

so much discussed in overtones beyond this tongue
 speaking with nature as nature arises in itself
 as scents burgeon to pollen
 roots pulling earth to sky
 breaking winter to spring
 in awakening converse

as such

words will never record
 sunlight green overtones of a conversation
 of my silence and talkative, chittering, rustling leaves

===== Thoughts =====

One tradition of Chinese Taoism upon getting older, is to walk away from mainstream society: to go back into the woods, into nature, to discover the Tao. In Hindu culture a person can become "sanyasis", handing off previous responsibilities, cast off their caste, return into nature to discover spiritual connections with an inner self and the larger universe. This casting off process is a common pattern across many cultures. The western world often labels this time of life as a "*mid-life crisis*"¹. Instead of being a "*crisis*", it should be understood as a transformative time when a person is seeking personal growth and enlightenment into something new. This is the path to becoming a sage. The process is like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly, complete with changes on all levels of a person's makeup.

Human conversation is an over-powering activity. Humans spend an extraordinary amount of energy making and listening to our expressions of life. They live amidst a cacophony of humanity. One aspect within the transformation into the sage typically includes walking away from the that cacophony. This permits a person to hear the more subtle conversations between the inner self and the natural world.

- 1) I find it interesting that western culture subverts this time of change into a consumer event. Instead of being a time of self discovery, mass culture labels it as the time to buy a red sports car or to have a fling. However, by the time the car gets paid off or the fling ends the chance to discover real change within oneself has often passed on by.

Mid-Life Revelations

Risking everything that I am
to become myself.

Juggling balls of fire
fire of my own spirit.

Transformation is never easy
Watching who you are crumble
While growing into the wonder of something new.

===== Paths =====

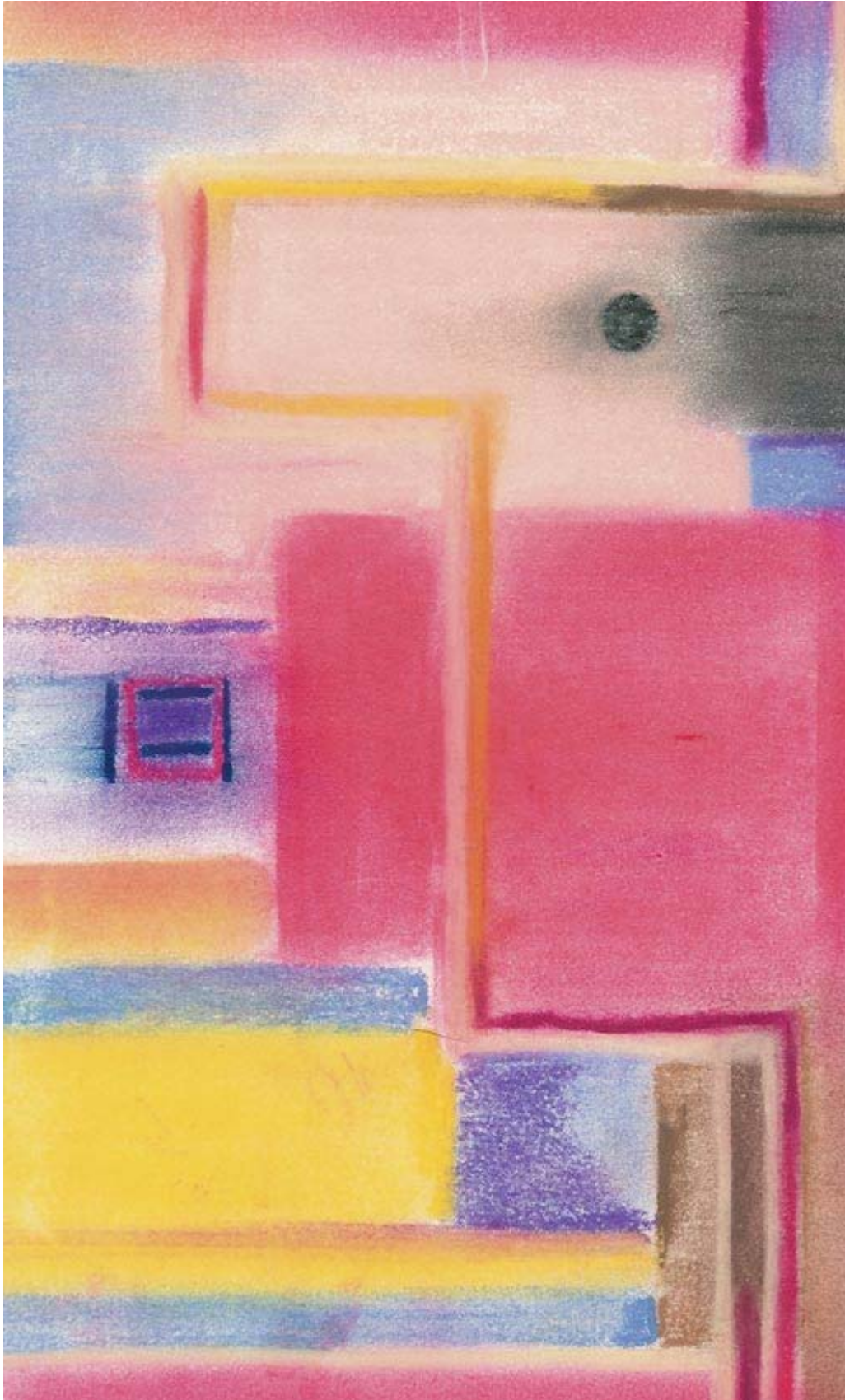
Twenty years ago I worked with Boris the engineer. Boris was in his early forties and one day he stopped working. Instead, Boris spent the entire day at his desk drawing abstract art. He would shuffle colors around for hours until at the end of the day he proclaimed it a masterpiece. It was nice art, but I didn't understand then why he stopped all work in order to make the drawing. It was clear that Boris was connecting to somewhere that I didn't have the same perspective to view.

Two years ago, at age 39, I found myself drawing. I talked to other people going thru similar bursts of expression upon reaching mid life. The common thread: the art is a probing into deeper levels of oneself. At age twenty my exploration was about reality and how it related to my direct experiences. At age forty this flipped around to the aspects of my life which are indirectly assessable. The drawings now made sense, as tools of expression at an emotional level. The whole goal is to stir into feelings the things that the 5 primary senses cannot directly discern. This emotional response acts as a lens to get a closer view of our hidden nature. For myself, this artistic process was the starting point of a mid-life transformation.

Having gone thru a mid-life transformation, I am surprised by how little our culture understands the process or supports this *inner revolution*. Western culture is more concerned with maintaining status quo. A mid-life transformation is a time of breaking one's personal status quo. This process of transformation takes time and is about a person changing & growing into themselves.

My other observation is it's very painful to be within the state of dramatic change too long. Typically it seems if the change isn't completed within several years' time social pressures and / or personal pain force people to revert to old patterns. Most people I have met never complete the transformation process for this reason.

I recommend growing into new aspects of life. To anyone going thru this process I encourage you to stay true to change. It's hard, risky and unpredictable. However, once completed the change opens up whole new aspects of living and whole new worlds to explore.



Movement of Water

Ask at the start of the day
What's important for the end of the day?

The answer can be analyzed down to:
--- Nothing ---

Which is always a starting point
Springing into --- following yourself
We ourselves are still one entity
Then match and choose something else
Letting it all fall into place one item at a time

That way nothing becomes one
and one becomes two
and the two become the 10,000 things
This is the Tao

===== Thoughts =====

My nine year old son Clayton replied when reading this,
“Feeding the animals is important at the end of the day.”

It was an automatic answer to the question. No fuss or worries, at the end of the day
dad we need to feed the animals that depend on us.

Children are of the Tao, because children tend towards actions that *feel* right, without
hesitation. Each action springs forth and we live in the dance of those actions.

===== Paths =====

The Tao : as an example, is a river

A person: a single eddy,
 a motion in a current,
 moments of swirling,
 reflecting when still as water
 swept quickly upon the currents

But all within a river which flows.

Where the river isn't only a river, rather, it's a cycle within larger cycles. The
movement of water is part of a much larger river of moving patterns.

From spring to stream to river to sea to cloud to rain to earth to spring.

Now unfold and repeat until you gasp at the discovery that each point in this cycle is
the *same moment* amidst the many which form the Tao. This is the most elemental
truth of how the interconnections harmonize between everything in nature.

Death

What is death?
Mixing shades of black
Awash black tie-die rolling of the bones

Emotions all in-tide-en-tangled
Down to? Stopping - still: Stopping to

Something described as sleep?
Passing back to... black? Inking the before time.

Time is calling

Soon to be soon to be myself fully realized...as fully into... a calling back into oneself

Tired of acting
Awakening to self

It's:
Some say heaven
Others say hell
Still others say nothingness

I have died
Know the truth
of nothing, more or less

So know
It's no longer pretending to be something
you are not

===== Thoughts =====
Kurt Vonnegut once wrote: "You have to be very careful what you pretend to be,
because you might wake up to find that's what you have become."

In life we pretend to be many things. It's imagination in action as living.

Death, is the time for us to return to our true nature, when a person no longer pretends
to be anything other than themselves.

Death isn't an ending of our paths. The moment of death is timeless and the turning
point of consciousness; it's when consciousness can touch the entirety of life. In
touching our entire nature we can stop pretending and *sigh* into the Tao.

Death is an experience which tempers the ego. Many myths have a person going into the land of the dead to learn. Even the Gods (Odin as example) would die in order to gain wisdom. I think it's true; one does gain wisdom from death, whether from personal experience or through experiences dealing with death naturally as it occurs in our lives.

Experiencing death within one aspect of our nature, ripples across our entire being. So experiencing a spiritual death is as real as experiencing a physical death. I have briefly touched upon both, and will share a brief story of my path and observations.

It was death
I found the passport
Indeed custom's rubber stamp
marked the departure

Death and memories did co mingle
I found a snapshot
Indeed a black and white image
recorded the event

Leading to a discovery

No time passed, no time existed
A day, a month, a second, a year
were all the same in the passport

Time is the key

People think death is eternal
Instead know
Death is moment-less, only life is eternal

Life mixes to: seconds, years, months, days.
As jumbled glimmering glances tumbling amidst
jostling
Moving to a beat...
As a spring sun beats down
Warming life, my life, growing again as a weed

Amidst the seconds that rain

As time is felt
and time is life
and life is time.

When I was a child I constantly tested how high my sneakers could bounce me. One day the sneakers *might* bounce me high enough to touch a cloud. The day I did touch the sky was without sneakers as an ocean wave slapped me backwards into drowning. No one knew I was drowning, that my body was quitting, my mind had switched over and everything was shutting down and, well, I was over the world; I could touch and hold Earth in my hands as I looked over the Earth in my moment of death. I didn't know to be afraid; instead I explored the nature of my life. *In one moment, I touched my entirety.*

Then my brother pulled me out, back into: Breath! Wonderful breath burst back into my lungs. As a child, I knew one moment I was dying, and in the next moment I was living again. Both moments were wonderful! I was truly living in the moment. After recapturing my breath, after gaining bearings again, I went straight back to playing in the water and had the most wonderful day in the ocean surf. Years later, when I asked my brother about that day, he didn't even realize he saved my life! He just pulled his silly brother out of the water when his little brother was under the water a little too long. He had no idea my spirit was packing up to go bounce around into another cycle of my life.

Ironic to find immortality within death itself
The secret, the truth, the path of immortality
Is simply to live in the moment

The secret of children
when we feel we can never die
Is the difference between being an adult and a child
All simply being within the moment and not outside

The moment is eternity
The moment is life everlasting
Within the moment a smile can be found
To enliven the spirit
To fire the blood back to pounding
Back into the beat
Of ever flowing life.

What happens when a boundary isn't a real boundary?

Adults assume a death boundary exists based upon pretty strong circumstantial evidence: everyone dies, no one comes back (or very few). I believe this evidence produces a purely one-sided model of death. A view comparable to saying the world is flat, complete with waterfalls into space, based just by looking out to sea and seeing a "*boundary*" of a horizon. My experiences of *living*, of passing thru the transitional time of death has led me to conclude that my "*expression of life*" is instead constantly moving thru, circulating thru all the possibilities of what we call life. Death isn't a boundary; it's a transition back into other expressions of our self.



Now when I tell people about my experience of drowning: almost every adult responds, “Oh my god! Drowning is the most terrible death”. I lose my words as I personally know drowning and indeed dying, can be a most wonderful experience. How do you convey an experience to a person who is so in fear of any death? I want to ask “*Do you worry about sleep, when the consciousness magically fades into the black for a few hours?*” I know the answer will be: “No: Because I wake up and remember myself”. The analogy will break down at this point, as dying, doesn’t bring you back the next day. Death brings one back into another expression of their own life, but it doesn’t normally round trip a person back into the same body the next day.

So where does this leave me in explanation?
What is my path concerning death?

We feel most alive when young
when every second is an eternity
So no surprise people try to re-capture life
as once before
bouncing childlike between the moments
.... Oh, it helps.....
But it isn't the answer.
How can it be when: we are not children anymore?

If you look to me for answers...
I can only admit to not having any
Perhaps in time I will have some

Matters not

As I go outside: lifting my face to the sky
feel sun, breeze, time
rain down on me
a second at a time

Many paths exist; start with the core of life

Living in the moment is the simplest to attain...
just by being in the moment.

No guru or tricks are required: It takes only patient self-exploration.

What would you do in a meeting
mixed with death, an ever nameless man and yourself?

Would you jump away?

Would you reach out?

Would you pray?

Would you ignore?

Would you discover poetry?

I am a poet, discovering poetry to be:
The end of one journey, and... The start of the next

I am a man
Once giving passing rites to another man
Now writing words meant to help those living
So others can discover

We never die alone

Immortality

It is said Taoists know the secret to immortality. This is true.

Do you desire to live forever? Taoists¹ in the “know”, (not that there is a “*know*”), would chuckle at immortality; skeptics will always scoff, and those afraid of death will always cling to the hope of immortality.

Over the years quite a bit of mythology has accumulated regarding Taoism and immortality, so let's straighten a few curves of this mythology. The initial Taoist texts pretty much ignore immortality. In fact, many of the original Taoist masters thought chasing the illusory forms of immortality was a distraction.

Your body will not last forever; by its very nature the body is defined by time. Accidents, disease, entropy or crazed weapon-swinging humans all have a habit of cutting the body down. Trying to change this will never bestow immortality. Various methods exist to extend life, and over time science will catalog more efficient ways to do so. Eventually it's conceivable that a human body could live a thousand years.

Bluntly: it's meaningless to do so, as it isn't and never will truly be immortality to extend our lives in such a manner. Taoists have a history of living long lives, but the long lives of our bodies is related to low stress, eating well and finding a balance between physical and meditative activities. Ironically, all of which are done not to extend our lives, but simply as a way to live comfortably within our body. If you are going to live, it doesn't make sense to prematurely destroy our physical representation! It makes sense to treat it with respect. In return, the body lives correspondingly well within the balanced life a Taoist leads.

Your mind will not last forever. What is the mind? Your thoughts? A limit exists to how much of our “self” can exist in the mind. Our memories fade. In our lives, we are actually a collection of several minds: as we age, we become different aspects of the mind. We change and become different people as we live. We might have a fundamental core, yet we do change throughout a life. I myself have lived at least seven² distinctly different lives. How can the mind be immortal, when it shifts so readily into new life?

1) As with any group of people, in Taoism there exist many different schools of thought. Some Taoist's do seek physical immortality. However, such a form of immortality is more of a distraction than a benefit. Immortality of the body has never been something outlined within the Tao-Te Ching. Also technically its longevity not immortality, which is the core of much of Taoist practices.

2) The seven lives so far are: infant, child, teenager, young adult, father, questor and sage.

There isn't immortality outside of our existence. We are an expression of our lives, our mind, our body, our spirit, our ego, our fetch, our being, our soul, our multiple forms... once leaving all the "ours" a person isn't anymore. Instead all the "our" building blocks return to the larger nature of the universe, to continue onward in a different cycle¹.

Instead heaven and other forms of an ultimate expression exist, within the "ours".

Everyone is immortal, within the infinite time span of their life.
Make of your life that which you want to be eternal.
Immortality is within our *existence*.

Immortality is best understood upon death. Immortality doesn't happen after death, afterlife is not an accurate statement. The problem is one of orientation. The ego is so geared to looking forward, that upon death, the ego assumes the vast vista of our immortal existence likewise is ahead of death². Discover it is behind and now within life, our immortality exists. Death just happens to be the convenient perch to view that vista.

If life is limited in time, then how is living within your life immortal?

Each moment is timeless

Life is the expression of all our possibilities

Reincarnation isn't after life: reincarnation is experiencing different life possibilities

Time is an illusion of consciousness

Consciousness is the wave of our existence flowing forever thru our lives

All moments are interconnected throughout *yourself*, throughout every expression of ever continuous lives.

It is possible to bounce within life. All moments are accessible. Our consciousness might appear linear, yet with meditation, with practice, it's possible to touch our overall existence, or to re-experience individual moments.

Stop, take a deep breath: I find it easier to just relax and actively embrace my personal experience, making this life an experience worth living within. Searching for proof could be endless, or simply can be summarized as one's life. Between the choices, it makes more sense to live the current life with enjoyment and peace.

1) Some would say that heaven is this rejoining to the larger universe. To a Taoist, this is also an acceptable view point. Heaven indeed is a mixing of the stars as much as to mixing to our lives. Like the Tao, heaven is something that isn't explainable in a single term definition: as it's outside the ego. As a side note: the Tao is not heaven, as the Tao crosses both life and heaven.

2) It's like stepping out of the subway station, and then getting confused in your directions.

Now back to death: death is merely an edge of our definition, a point at which the ego stops pretending. Death is the point where our consciousness spreads wide to let go¹, at this juncture it readily becomes possible to touch our entirety. Once our entirety relaxes fully within death, the consciousness rebounds back into one of the countless possibilities which define our personal existence. We are both immortal and mortal. Embrace your nature as both, live your mortal existence in peace, to have heaven in your immortal existence as well.

1) It's interesting as from the Buddhist point of view, this would be the point at which a Buddha suppresses the consciousness on a permanent basis ending, in effect, the Buddha's immortal existence.

===== Proofs =====

The view I have stated is my own, based upon the combination of life experiences, visions, perceptions and faith within my own nature.

Belief of my statements, proofs based upon my life are meaningless for anyone else. Likewise having others believe in me, has no meaning back onto myself. The belief game, the proof game, the miracle game are all shams. Tricks of the light used to prop ourselves to stand tall, until realizing each ray of light was merely a flickering shadow.

Part of the Personal Tao is to understand that at some point a need will occur to accept views based, not upon the outside world or others, but instead upon ourselves. Much of what we seek on the deepest level within a "*universal truth*" cannot be proven, will have contradictions, and will not even make sense when having the correct answers. This is unavoidable due to our incomplete nature. Yet, and here is the contradiction, we are complete within our own personal nature. It is within this finite absolute limit of being alive, that I can find my eternal nature as I am completely and always myself.

I am eternal within my own nature. I rejoice within this.

Spirit and Soul

Years ago, I met a special woman. She asked me the following question:

"If you had to take an animal, a force of nature, and a mythical reference:
How would you write a sentence to describe yourself?"

I answered:

"A breeze wrapped around a dragon who is a cat sleeping in the sun."

After looking at the answer, I discovered many aspects which were true and informative about my nature. Since then, I often ask this of other people. So I ask you now as the reader to spend some time and try it out. It might take a day or two. Mythical references could be anything: I have known people who were only unicorn horns, or various aspects of a myth such the eternal slumber of an enchantment. It's beautiful how creative people can be.

Write it out below after figuring out something you like.

I also discovered people are surprisingly honest in the answers given. Look closely at your answer: it reveals quite a bit about your ego, spirit and soul. This leads into the next question.

What is the difference between soul and spirit?

Heart of the matter
Essence of a question
Uncover, Discover, Recover
Ego, Soul, Spirit
Let eyes wander to the skies
Revealing
Dragonfly, Butterfly, Fireflies

Before reading the rest of the section, try to answer this question. Again, as before, take several days even. Come back at a later time. Be aware that the definition of soul and spirit varies quite a bit between cultures. In fact these two words are overloaded with countless meanings, making it harder to tease out a personal answer.

What is the difference between soul and spirit?

Soul is what we are

Connection of mind, heart, body
Reflection showing echoes of nature: our nature
Amidst Mother Nature
Everything has a soul
The nature of being something: to be as it is...
is the soul
Soul is simply one's nature.

Soul silently proclaims, always openly revealing
hidden truths
stars in the palm
rock steady
looking up and back
Soul stands out clearly to be seen
not noticed
amid
Explosions of life
colors, growth, egos, movements, distractions
Consciousness ever distracted
by beauty, by motion, by fire, by life
Soul the centering of what we are

Spirit is Soul in motion

Feel the beat instead
touch the heat
Feel
Fire in the belly
Fire
Worlds are ever changing, always blurring,
blurring... burning
Life ever fleeting by very nature
Life is change, We are life
This is Life
Fire in the Belly

Embracing, moving flames of spirit
Spirit touches -ever brushes- passing
Spirit's magical connections, brewing, mixing
consciousness -- faith -- acceptance
of oneself within the fire
the fire in the belly
that tides to life

As a mathematician, on one level I think of spirit as the integral of the soul.

I discovered something interesting when asking myself the question: “Ego” kept bouncing its way into my answers. So this left me with the problem of also answering what ego was all about.

Ego is the sheepdog of the spirit, keeping our form.

Pulling “You” back down is Ego
An ever dancing trickster
Ego always checking the math, bottling fireflies,
pinning the butterfly
Asking what is a noun, verb or adjective
Ego is all about
Resisting, throwing confusion to the e-y-I-y-e's
Impishly ego devilishly tries to control your soul
Its trick lies in YOUR nature
feel ego's ploy
A rope of pronouns
lashes of colorful self deception

Ego is a very small part of our overall nature, yet it seems to command an overly large presence.

Why does Ego try to steal the show?

Ego is the herding dog, the trickster, the ringmaster keeping us together. Without ego, it would be simple to just accept ourselves as part of the larger universe and fade back into being one with the universe. Yet ego steps in, keeping a person together, an individual's static cling to the spirit, binding it all together just long enough to form an expression of our individual self.

Dragonfly: Ego always fights to make you more.
Fireflies: Spirit burning ever so to proclaim: *alive*
Butterflies: Soul of our nature

All flickering flirting, flitting
Weaving together
different view points of our form
into a single expression
of self

As a child I was taught
To be as rock
I am not
- I am fire, which is life -
To be myself
Means cracking rock apart to spark

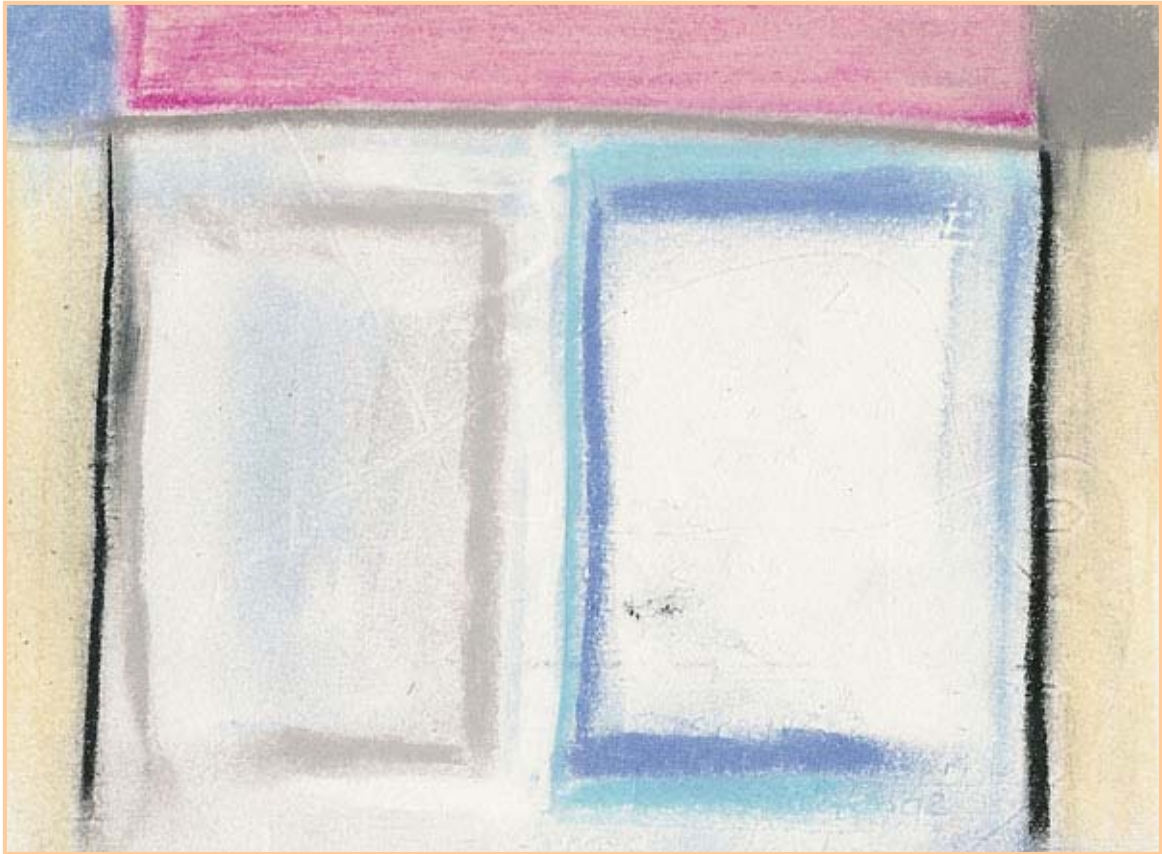
Sisyphus discovered immortality has a price
but not all rock is made of stone
When defying the gods
Burdens of life become our own.

In time all rock wears away
But the spark, life itself, is an everlasting fountain of flame
Leaping from peak to peak to burn on
Against the storms
To defiantly burn - brightly - is "My" burden

Gods come and go,
It's the nature of creation.

But "My" nature is to live, move on, burn burn brightly

My nature is to Be Fire of Life.



Open windows within life
Discover
Your soul

Definitions

People insist on definitions
tell Me what it Is!
what's the Color? what's the Taste? what's the ...
all this adds up and up and up
to being a box,
within which a person is buried
the box decays into the Tao

Future and Past are definitions
as
definitions come and go
Now
We are always as we are
as is the Tao

past, Now, future: What time do you live within?

===== Thoughts =====

A definition could be based on the future, in which case it's a pattern. A definition of the past is a memory. In the “**now**” we are alive where all "definitions" are meaningless until the moment passes. The act of later adding value to the “**now**” would be called intro / retro - spection for the past and expectation for the future. Each of which is an organized method of "lying" to oneself.

An ability of humanity is storing memories in order to build up patterns. This summarizes down to the basis of being "I". We as living creatures constantly recompile our own terms of existence relative to terms of the Past and Future. Our behavior/actions are then directly related to how much of the future and how much of the past we mix together to form the “I”. An infant of 1 isn't an "I" or "Me" yet: how can the child be so when not yet having the time to compile the concept of self relative to a past / future combination? For this reason an infant is always one with the Tao.

Being able to remember the past and predict the future are both powerful tools we possess. The extreme power of these tools suggests care should be exercised in their use. To a Taoist: life is defined as it happens rather than by the tools themselves.

===== Water =====

Does water predict where it will flow? Does it remember where it has been? Water just flows to its nature. In doing so, it shapes the world, flies as vapor, cascades in rain and is the basis of all life on Earth. Hence Taoists always refer to water in examples of how to be one with the Tao.

Human Waves

How I am alone?
Every day I touch 233,623 other people.
People in ever increasing numbers
---- Inter-connecting out our stories-----

Witnessing feet: in a pair of Nike sneakers walking upon...
The spirit of 7 Indonesian children, unable to buy the shoes they sew.
Picking up and eating a peach, while holding...
Hands of 52 Migrant farmers harvesting the crop.
Typing poetry upon a computer as the hard drive spins...
235 souls turning as cogs assembling more computers.

Add up the numbers, discover a surprise
How quickly these connections trace around **our** planet
Everyone, each of whom likewise, reaching, reaching out
Caught in a vast web of economic dependencies
Till as a group we are all:
6 billion hungry people: eating a planet to bedrock
Showing that yes, each of us matters
That two feet are indeed the crest
of a wave 467,246 feet tall
In wave after wave after wave
Grinding Earth down
Wearing it down
To sand, within a pair of sneakers.

.....

...

.

===== Thoughts =====

This was written in an exaggerated poetic flourish to illustrate that economically and realistically our footsteps do add up to much more than two feet. Action and lifestyle do matter; even seemingly small choices as buying a pair of shoes are reflected across an entire planet. The friction of these actions burn the very Earth: Earth is on fire. Look at the pictures from space, our little planet burns with the light of our own living fires!

To be alive is to be within this chain of life. Life pushes life about; life jostles; Life consumes, life devours life...

Is it wrong to kill? ...

The ideas of right and wrong are moral choices, subject to the whims of each individual life. Life consumes energy and life is energy, so its no surprise the chain of life reuses itself in consumption of expression.

... *Or wrong to change the world?*

Each and every life changes the world. Life is fire, to burn
by action means to consume and change the surrounding world.
The importance in Taoism is to understand when changing the world
all actions of change echo back into ourselves.

It destroys several acres of life¹ to build a TV, which makes exactly a single TV along
with vast amounts of pollution. It might be economically cheap to use a slash and
burn style of manufacturing, yet the hidden overhead price will be a burden of waste
and disease. We are seeing the effects of this in our health today. For some odd
reason people seem to have a habit² of creating vast estates of toxic dumping grounds.
Unfortunately this reflects back to create toxic human bodies. The roots of our cancer
are directly tied to the lack of respect people show to the world and life around us.

Know nature always has a balance.
Nature's accountants never use dollars in its balance sheet.
Nature's currency is life itself.

For this reason all life is equal.

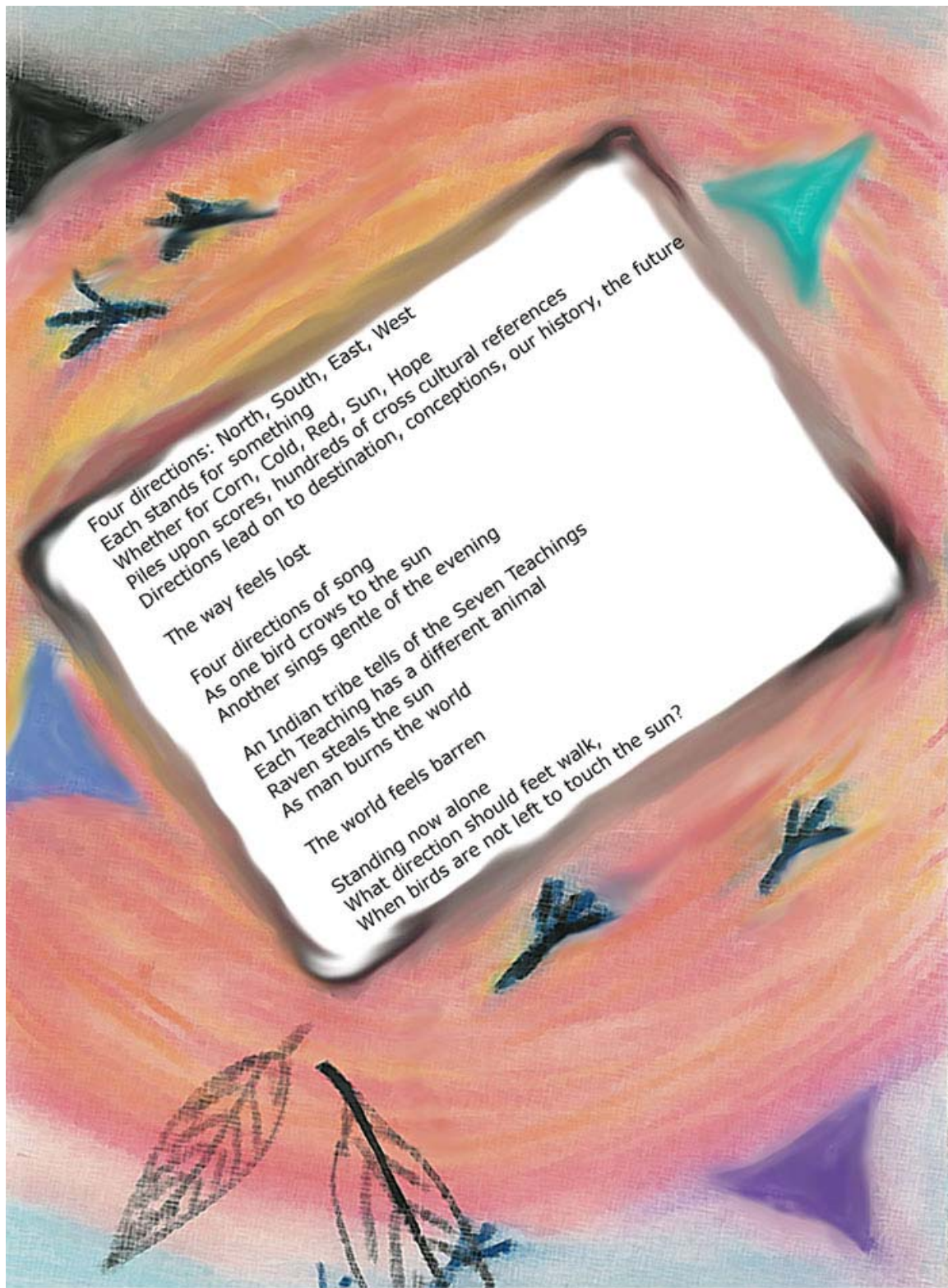
It's always possible to have a balance, but without respect, humans live no differently
than bacteria³ trapped in a Petri dish: doomed to consume all resources and then
perish within the waste by-products. So know the choice isn't life itself, but our
choice is one of lifestyle, expressing ourselves with or without respect.

To be alive means accepting involvement within the web of life. Removing ourselves
from this web removes us from the basic interconnections which form our
fundamental physical natures.

===== Paths =====

In the near future the most powerful will be those able to live simply.

- 1) Modern natural resource management: mines, strip mines, clear cutting, when you take something out of the land, the disturbance ripples out and affects *all the life* in the surrounding area. Each and every product a consumer buys will result in the death of some life somewhere on Earth, this is part of the price of getting that consumer product built and delivered for personal use. This statement is neither right nor wrong, it is simply fact. We are all consumers, life touches life, life consumes to be alive and often times it's harsh.
- 2) This habit is an expression of power, or marking territory. A person littering: throwing a bottle out over the river is saying I have the power to throw my trash over you. Humans and trash are of a similar nature as a wolf piss marking a tree.
- 3) Humans are animals, and the second a person thinks humanity is higher than other life, becomes the defining point for a person to lose parts of their own human nature. Sadly bacteria tend to live in more natural harmony than the average human, which is why bacteria tend to kick our butts around when we get sick.



Flow

Autumn Again

Leaves as words flowing down
Ground, paper, leaves, words
 Mixing together statements
Drifting expressions
 Tracing skeletons bare
 to what we were.

Leaves letting loose to be free
to swirl and dance upon the wind
Once upon a summer
They tried so hard to reach in growth to crack the sky
Imagine the joy upon colorful bursting to release
Spiraling finally to be free
with this last dance to the ground.

Religion

Being a Taoist doesn't tie a person down to a religion. It's very possible to be a Christian and a Taoist, or indeed to mix any religion with Taoism.

The Tao is not a religion.

What is a religion? I define religion as:

A system of belief, attitudes and practices set towards the service and worship of a God or the supernatural.

The Tao is not God, and the Tao is not supernatural. As such Taoism is not a religion; it's simply living to your nature with harmony relative to the Tao.

To confuse the issue people have taken Taoism and have converted it to a religion. So while Taoism is not a religion, a religion called Taoism does exist. On one level, these Taoist religions are simply a set of practices that help a person achieve balance within life. The "religious" forms of Taoism take a slightly Buddhist approach in elevating to a "deity" level wise immortal Taoist elders, each acting as guides in understanding the Tao. These Taoist religions are heavily influenced by the works of earlier Taoist sages.

Typically westerners separate the two as Taoism a "philosophy" compared to Taoism a "religion". This style of separation has been very misleading, as this limits the way westerners think of Taoism. Labeling leads to missing a whole range of subtleties within Taoism by starting with narrowed predefined concepts of a Taoist practice.

To further complicate everything Taoism has influenced and changed religions such as Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. At times it can be confusing to understand the distinctions between some Buddhist teachings and Taoism itself. So it's important to understand and restate that the basic form of Taoism itself is not a religion.

The next question is: What would Taoism say about religion in general?

Taoism doesn't say anything about religion.

My personal view is that all religions are true to the faith which fosters the belief. God, or all gods, are true and are of the Tao, when a person's belief is true to his or her faith. This flows into a concept that all Gods / God are of a personal nature, even when being shared through an organized religion. No single religion represents the entirety of humanity, as humanity itself is a spectrum of faith. This overall spectrum blends together to create a representation of humanity which is then within and at one with the Tao.

As a result, Taoists aren't necessarily religious, but typically blend aspects of their religious upbringings and cultures with their personal practices.

Taoism is **more** than just a “philosophy” or a “religion”. A Personal Tao shouldn’t be confused with the concept of a personal god. A Personal Tao rises out of all the different concepts of Taoism and should be understood as being:

A system of belief, attitudes and practices set towards the service and living to a person’s own nature.

===== The Question of God =====

For many, the issues of Religion and God are co-mingled to the point of being simmered down to the question: Does God exist? Many phrase this as a black or white question with definite answers: God either does or doesn’t exist. If you are an atheist, then God doesn’t exist; if you practice a religion, then God exists relative to your belief structure.

Taoism offers the third path: Skip the question! The question of God’s existence is **irrelevant**. God could or could not exist, and either state doesn’t change the way we lead our lives. Our lives are expressions of action between ourselves and the universe. To respect our surrounding environment is a furthering of respect to ourselves. This manner of living doesn’t change regardless of the nature of God.

This doesn’t make a Taoist Godless; rather a Taoist considers God a wonderful question to meditate against (***much like sharpening a knife against a rock***) but to put to the side when dealing with daily concerns. This is where the Personal Tao steps into the equation. If a person has faith in a higher being (***if they know the expression of their life matters relative to this belief***) then it’s acceptable to live to those beliefs. The point where belief becomes unacceptable is upon forcing faith unto someone else or even oneself. Forcing a view typically comes out of an unsurity of faith. Forcing belief is the attempt to keep faith thru a process of action and subjugation. Such actions flow against finding a true Personal Tao.

Humanity was given free will

While gods and devils
never turned away
how could they?
never having freedom

always chained
to choices made in the rolling of the bones
our bones
which we toss down
every day

The only gods, the only devils
are those found in mirrors
dogged to our own whims

In prayer
An Iraqi woman cries
as her son is dead
under the stones of bombs
"Where is God!"

Where is God?

God is the dice of our very own bones
being rolled over everyone's graves

We roll the bones of each other
in games of free choice
Which tumble the fates about
with each and every life,
thrown away,
every day

What choices have you made?
Who's grave have you rolled over today?

You cannot be handed the Tao-Te Ching and magically discover a doctrine of belief. This offers a real problem for a Taoist, as each Taoist must find a personal path and acceptance of inner faith. While Taoist texts will offer hints for living wisely, they will not open up the universe's door with a set of SUV keys to 4 wheel drive thru bramble patches. Instead these books speak in metaphors: *"Flow as a river undercutting around the bramble bush and have a nice day."* Taoist texts will often elaborate telling you: *"When falling off a cliff directly into the brambles, consider how amazing and flexible the brambles are in their nature, helping in part to break your fall, then with calmness, let gravity tumble you clear of the brambles"*. At this point most readers stop and wonder what the hell they just read. Some people actually prefer to be told or taught directly how to live, which many organized religions happily try to do. This means many religious texts will just say *"Thou shalt not jump in the bramble bush"*. Taoism instead encourages a person to just be themselves and explore the brambles.

The problem I have with many religions is being told directly what faith should be, which ends up as someone else's version of faith. This, in turn, means people are left to break tenets of their religious background or belief system, in order to be themselves. This creates an internal battle between their nature and an imposed outside vision. Everyone has some variation in their being; it's part of our humanity. Taoism has the advantage of always being practiced to your own faith, as you actively pursue what feels right instead of what has been labeled as right. Nothing is more natural than being a Taoist. It's being true to the self. The bigger problem is discovering your nature and what inner faith holds true for you.

My upbringing was Taoist, yet my parents didn't practice Taoism. My father was an atheist, my mother an animist, and my friends were various Christian denominations. Strangely, my parents and other adults never tried too hard to impose any of their own nature onto my soul. Instead, I was left alone to wander to the whims of my nature. Some days I would just meander along a river all day, some days I would just talk to different people listening to their life stories, some days I would play with the trees, and other days I would explore and mix into the streets of New York City. Since I didn't cause too many problems, I was returned the courtesy of unhampered freedom. In this wandering, I discovered myself and later realized it was also called Taoism. The path was surprisingly simple. When coming across something that made sense, I tried it. Over time I discarded items which didn't feel right, discovering the wisdom of newer truths, all the while always permitting myself to just be myself.

I discovered that truth is ever shifting, based mainly upon perception; living recommends a path of shifting along. Truth breaks when a person doesn't flow with the reality of the world. At this point it should be mentioned that we have inner truth and outer truths. Overall truth is the balance between these inner and outer truths. In searching for truth, at some point a person will encounter religion. No matter how much one searches the outside world, at some point, inner personal questions surface which cannot be resolved by simple observation or interaction with the outer world. Religion is one of many tools which can be used to help find answers to difficult questions.

If you are secure and know yourself truly, and know your faith is true, then skip the rest of this section. Your path is true, and that is wonderful and indeed you are finding your own Personal Tao.

If you are wondering and have doubts: seemingly can't find answers that make sense with religions you encounter. Many other people have the same problem. I watch people who try so hard to find a religion that fits them. Looking, trying on churches like clothes, reading different spiritual texts, trying out recommendations of others... looking some more, and then some more and more and more: All the searching becomes "evermores"... Each reaching out is like a fly, flies buzzing around, which end up being distractions that we swat away. The buzz isn't about finding a religion, it's a searching to establish a firm acceptance of ourselves and the larger universe. The goal is a "surety of self" within the tumbling tide of life.

Religions come with a pre-packaged set of practices to help guide one into that surety of self. Of course seemingly countless religious packages exist. Typically, people make due with something which feels close to the mark or with the religion that was handed to them at the start of their lives. Living like this, just making due, can leave one with constant doubt, anxiety and feeling lost.

Finding self doesn't have to be a process of discovering religion (or scientific facts). Religions (and Science) are both a path for discovering how a person fits in with the world. So to those having problems trying to find something which feels right, the solution is simple: Flip the spiritual quest around and instead spend some time with yourself. Begin writing a journal, which in turn will become a set of personal scriptures to help discover how to be yourself. A person needs only to accept themselves, to find their place within the larger world. It's accepting the bad -the absolution- which is often the greatest gift of a religion. This absolution is the gift of acceptance. A beautiful event within religion is when a clergy member takes the time to truly accept you first; this makes it easier in turn to accept yourself later. It's a spiritual trick to aid someone to learn how to accept themselves. So the spiritual practice of any religion can be understood as accepting yourself for your own nature, which becomes wondrous upon the acceptance. Religions teach this from the outside while Taoism teaches this from our inner selves. Both paths are options; it's just a question of how to reach the goal.

Living Guidelines

Creating a personal map¹ to the soul offers both insight and direction to clear away many obstacles we encounter within life. The first step is to list the principles behind our actions. Writing such a list was a critical milestone in my spiritual growth. It opened my life to be lived rather than just passing the time. I am in no way stating other people should live to these guidelines. Instead this is the process I used to come to terms, with my own personal acceptance of living. These “guidelines” shift with the movement of my life.

Realistically, guidelines don't determine how I live;
instead by living I will express who I am.

With care, I aid those who are extended expressions of my nature.

My children, partners, parents, friends, pets, any spirit who lives within my essence: are all extensions of my own nature. I must take the time to care appropriately for those who are dependant upon my own nature. This is an ever changing and shifting balance. Blind co-dependence is not something I encourage, as it subtracts from my nature. However, mutual sharing of spirit is very beneficial as it enhances my nature. Caring for the ones I love thusly fulfills a major part of my own essence.

Be true to myself

If I cannot be true to myself, I end up destroying myself. I cannot aid another by destroying myself. Even if it means disappointing others, it's important to take care of my very own nature.

To those in my heart, it's better to disappoint than to disappear.
To those outside of my spirit its better to disappear than disappoint.

I cannot give away my soul to another, as to do so would destroy that nature. My spirit can freely entangle with others, but our nature is always uniquely our own. Giving your soul away is to not be true to yourself.

Connect to the world as I want to be treated.

My actions reflect back to me on every level.

While I can act as I please, I also have no desire for people to treat me without respect. I will almost always try to treat others with respect and patience. At times, I will act outside this rule, since to gain respect sometimes means responding to people using their own rules which can be quite different than mine.

1) Many different maps exist. One of my favorites is the mandala. Navajo and Buddhist traditions use the mandala to create a visual map to our spiritual world. Not every principle can be expressed in words, many times the best way to reveal something is art itself.

Connect to those outside my nature with decisive action.

It subtracts from my nature to give mixed signals to others. When connecting to something or someone outside me, the way I represent myself reinforces my own nature. When dealing with those outside of my spirit, I will be decisive and clear in my actions.

I have learned part of acting decisively is to base actions clearly on my own nature.

To those unwilling to accept me for my true nature, I will then reflect them.

To some this means I am a chameleon, blending in. To others I will seem to be a fool. In either case it's a waste of time trying to convince people about who I am. I am always myself. But it's foolish to not accept each person as uniquely themselves. To those unwilling to accept me I often will reflect them. In most cases it typically means I become the fool. Perhaps I do this to protect myself, at times I do this in the hopes I will shatter a tarnished mirror. But I act the fool when, {as quite simply}, I just wish to be left alone. Most people (even those who once loved you) leave fools blissfully alone.

Now to illustrate why these are living guidelines

Having been the chameleon for many years, and having played the part of the fool, I have come to the conclusion that either role, while a quite safe place, is no longer a place I wish to hide.

This rule has changed recently to become:

To those unwilling to accept me for my true nature, no action is required: just silently let them be themselves as I remain myself.

Once in my life I was a chameleon and a fool. Those were part of my nature, to protect myself as I needed time to develop and grow in a culture which almost crushed my spirit. Now that I have fully and truly accepted my nature I can shed these aspects, safely becoming myself. I am grateful for the time within the protection of those two roles and a chance to try out the many different aspects the role of chameleon and fool permitted me to experience. But for now I have settled into a more reflective role. In time I will change again.

I own nothing: I am merely a passing custodian of items outside of my nature.

I pretty much share everything. Thinking I own something is an illusion. I might hold control over something, but possession is not ownership. The moment I believe I own something is the moment I am no longer free to be my own nature. I openly share what I have with **those who show respect to the items and myself**. A custodian has a responsibility of respect; a person who shares with me, has the responsibility of returning some respect back. When multiple people become a custodian of an item, I am more careful on how openly the item gets shared as I must also respect and consider the other custodians.

I have found these guidelines have been a way to live unselfishly: helping others freely and openly is a direct result of being true to my nature.

This is a very nice way to live. It leads to a balance of becoming part of an ever growing community of those I love and connect to within life.

===== Paths =====

Here are two stories from my path as samples of the guiding principles within my life.

Example of caring for those whom I love, while being true to myself.

Olympia is a special place; unfortunately the Pacific Northwest is the source of a few pretty serious allergies which cause me quite a bit of pain. For health reasons, I would have long ago meandered to Central America or other warmer climates better suited to my nature. However, after my divorce I didn't want to leave my two children. That left me in a terrible position. Stay somewhere which was literally tearing my mind and shredding my body (severe allergies can really mess a person up I discovered), or to leave which would have consequences for my children. Several additional factors in the situation left me at a point of internal conflict.

I decided to stay in Olympia for my children, but I also decided the reason to stay in Olympia should be to support my nature. I had a need to understand the depression, and as it later turned out the allergies which were the source of that depression. I decided my staying in Olympia needed to be the time to understand why it felt like the Pacific Northwest was driving me away. The reason to stay was to discover more about myself. The solution took years to uncover. I had to stop and examine my nature. I spent time to understand my needs thru activities such as spoken word poetry to closely examine my mind and spirit. I learned more about my body, beginning to seriously explore yoga and martial arts which healed my physical self, and in turn strengthened my overall system to better resist the allergies. I spent time to determine what foods I should or shouldn't eat, as it turned out food also played a role in the allergies. I then discovered how the body works internally, so I could perform deep internal exercises to aid my liver and kidneys, which in turn helped purify the body of the allergens. All these activities led me to discover interconnections between mind, body and spirit. Over 5 years I took the time to understand myself so I could also support those I love. As a result of this hard work, patience and time I was able to be true to myself and care for my children.

Many times staying and not running is the hardest thing a person can do

Everyday, I lie to myself
"I can leave whenever I wish"

Everyday I say this. Everyday I stay
Beaten bruises should push me away
I stay
Hiding tears, pain, truth
Hide it in lies, smiles and fantasy

It doesn't matter
Everyday losing something more of myself
Everyday laying a little longer,
picking myself off the ground, slowly, to continue this play

Every night I lie to myself.
Going to sleep, it feels so easy
Maybe the gray, the midnight dark will stay, keep the day away

It doesn't, it never does.

Leaving me to morning, another day
Saying: "I can leave whenever I wish"

Could have, should have, would have left
Living, living free, not beaten, to be true to life, is who you are
Is what calls, howls in my dreams

No!

As much as I want to flee
Truth, true to my life, means to love others...
It's returning love in my children's eyes
It's helping friends beaten to the ground
with my hand so they may walk again.

Silently unknowingly:
These loved ones pick me up off the ground everyday.

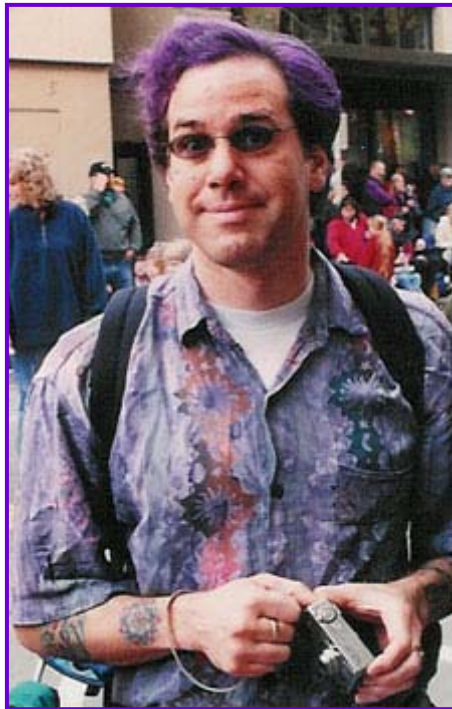
I won't lie
I will leave someday
It just won't be today

Allow time to discover yourself, a process that spans an entire lifetime.

Story of connecting to those outside my nature with decisive action.

One evening, Julie and I were walking home. Along the way, a pitbull attacked us. In that moment I acted decisively. I became my full self and demanded directly to the dog to stand down. The dog and I sized each other up in one of those perfect seconds that last a little longer than a second. The dog reacted as if I would have taken it down completely¹ because I knew and decisively told the dog as much with my full expression of self. Then the pitbull walked away. If I didn't act as myself, if I had any mixed emotions, doubts or fear, the pitbull would have then had doubt about my nature, and it would have attacked me, since a pitbull's nature is to attack when in doubt. Instead Julie and I walked away 5 seconds later with no harm to anyone. While this is an extreme example, in some aspects, it shows the truth of clearly communicating with decisiveness.

1) Just because I am a Taoist and peaceful 99% of the time doesn't mean I am always passive. Being a Taoist means always living relative to your nature and the situation you are within. If a situation requires forceful actions then you need to be prepared to use forceful actions with full commitment.



Procession of the Species Olympia WA, 2003
Photo by Kris Hicks-Green

Me

Poet, Sage (not all sages have grey hair),
Father, Lover, Casey, Former Fool,
Boy, Man, Patterner, Author, Chameleon,
Wind, Dragon, Sun, Cat,
Once upon a time even a Purple Jester
Joyful
Countless
nouns and adjectives
- trying and defining one a day -

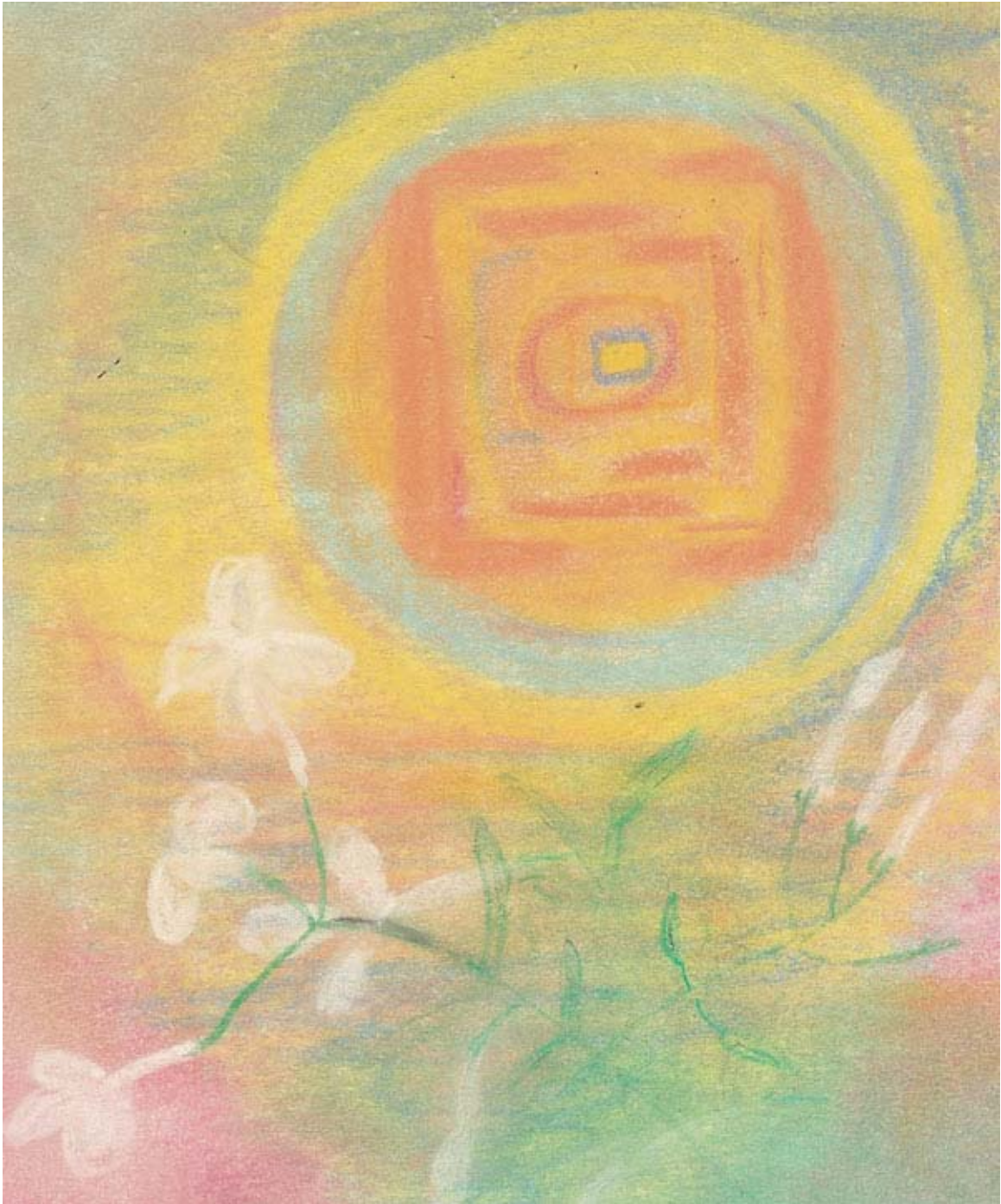
Explorer

Always myself
NO matter what appearance¹ is playing²

We are what we are, be true to your own guidelines
ever following the tumbling stars strewn along the way

- 1) Don't underestimate appearance. While it's a shell, we still gain strength and protection from our appearance. It's a powerful form of magic being a shape shifter and controlling your appearance.
- 2) Be warned appearance is often a shell game of ego. There is no power, only deception, in these shell games.

Jasmine



Time is meaningless
Touching across time: Connecting back to Summer Jasmine



Exhale 2005

???

what might/have be/en

Mixing in the mind,
life like fantasies:
dreaming of what might have been.
In so many different ways
at so many different times,
looking to the past, clearly seen -are-
countless choices, countless possibilities

--- Yet, only one happened. ---

----- Flip perspective. -----

Looking to the future.
Looking towards
Fortune tellers, Astrological charts and Soothsayers
As if
only one choice
only one possibility
existed

Cruxes and puzzles
Looking to the past, desiring so many changes.
While
Looking to the future, wishing only one option.

In this perspective
So many ways, So many people
Living backwards.

Simpler just swirling
Watching, embracing, acting out
As leaves tumbling to the wind, as they may
As our lives: happen regardlessly
mixing with the wind

===== Thoughts =====
Now ignore the poem. Drop thoughts missing in action. This section is about nothing.

Should this be written about something missing in your life? Why? Life is filled with everything you make it to be. Ignore the blame games¹, ignore what might be, even empower yourself to say “fuck it” to the past. What do you really want, here and now? Go, go now, only you can write the directions for this path. The directions are embedded in your feet. No one else will give you the car keys: in fact, there is no car. Just walk and go.

1) The worst sort of trap, binding whole generations to hatred.

===== Paths =====
a period is a fiction, nothing stops, don't stop, even if by doing nothing, just
Go

Animals

My cat Ishtar knows kung-fu. I have watched her perform spinning back flip kicks against me in the middle of the night to initiate play. We then get into these sumo wrestling matches. This interaction with Ishtar makes me think about how we connect with animals. Humans have a special talent for empathy, to feel and touch the experience of other life. How would it change society if humanity embraced the value of empathy as much as cash?

Note

I removed roughly one page of material here... Ishtar couldn't make out a single word I was writing...

It's all too easy for us to get lost within our words. Ishtar reminds me living is never a matter of words.

===== Thoughts =====
The empathy we possess ensures humanities destiny will be a reflection of how people treat other life on the planet.

Ishtar is a cat
A very rare cat
Who knows physics.

To the world
The ever crazy world
Ishtar is merely a blur.

However,
Ishtar never moves
Ishtar never flinches
Ishtar knows relativity
It's all a matter of sitting
The world dancing in a blur.

It is easy
to play all day
It is easy
to be as velcro
to a curtain
or even
the occasional human.

All it takes is the simple use
of claws and physics

A wise cat
only needs to sit
letting the world
spin around the paws.

Yes
Ishtar is a cat
A very rare cat
who knows physics
in space & time
is merely a matter of
paws and claws

===== Paths =====

When possible, Ishtar and I siesta under the sun. When required, we hunt for our needs. When bored, we kick out to stir up the wonder of the world.

Life is not about complexities or simplicity.
Living instead flows to the beat of needs and feelings.

And empathy?
Living to feelings includes
Coming to harmony within a surrounding emotional ocean.

Expectations

When asked what Taoism is, I often respond: Having no expectations.

Stop here and pause: for a few seconds, think about the following:
What are *your* expectations in life? What do **you** expect from reading this?

Ok... I will doodle to the side, while you ponder the questions ~* ^-^ { @ } :^)

In this doodle time, as the author I begin to wonder: What are *my* expectations right now... and fuck! ¿What am I thinking... my expectations about writing on expectations? This is just an imprisoning feedback loop of pondering expectations... it's ludicrous. I am typing this, at this very very moment and I am also looking out the door seeing a rain, a rain of cherry petals, mixing out of the open doorway, in the front yard, spinning in the air as snow, in pinkish leaves, down, down to the grass, mixing to dark green grass... an ocean of wind, whisking floating waves as clouds adding their persistence as wind rolling against the earth, a cool nipping, mixing to the raining of softest petals.

Part of me now is still thinking as an engineer: my thoughts
{*build a map, determine past and future expectations, list the changes, chart patterns of unfulfilled expectations...*}

The same moment, the poet side of my nature slaps me to the curb telling me
just to stop

Don't do anything, stop for a moment
Feel the breath, touching fingers, feeling soft lips pushing a deep breath,
Break free not in thinking, but in action
Eyes close down... - - , and then, I walked away from this



...

{To outside of here}

Right **now I am** typing, **now** 10 minutes ago I
was just under a cherry tree, witnessing
flower petals dancing upon the wind.

Right now you are reading this in my distant
future....

These moments are connected
All these **nows**, tied together as the very same
moment, all the same, we are together,
because there are **no** expectations, **Right now**
we are not boxing ourselves into manmade
boundaries. Instead we are flowing to a larger
world, pushing us up and out of chairs, mixing
in with spring's scent of lilac highlighted to
the sound of the wind hopping between trees.

Right now, just stopping all expectations of what I was trying to write, to instead skip into a flow, into a moment, joining to a true nature, inviting you, now, by merely experiencing this page, to come alongside to share spring with me.

Discovery is not forced thru narrow expectations. Instead join in with this barefooted walking away from loops within more loops of trying to define our limits. Feel an Olympian touch of spring as this collection of fallen petals just collected and now drying upon this very keyboard I am typing upon, becoming part of these images of living in the here and now.



If people live in a culture where personal value is based upon expectation,
what happens when discovering life
exceeds any bounds of expectation.

Is your nature enough to just be yourself
or
will you build your nature upon expectation?

===== Thoughts =====

An expectation isn't a reality. It's a hope of things to be, a useful tool in a fortune telling sort of way, charting a course of action.

Expectations: a package deal, bundled down with an emotional ribbon of attachment. It's the attachment which forms the core problem of expectation. The advantage of attachment is that a person gains additional strength by personalizing a process. However, the counterbalancing issue: life constantly changes, or we encounter other people with attachments to plans opposite of our own intention¹.

I have personally discovered that very rarely do I meet my expectations. For this reason I personally ignore expectations most of the time. It takes too much energy to attach and then un-attach myself constantly, trying to fit to the whimsy of the world. I have chucked the expectation routine out the door. Much like the intro to this section, discovering the world presents constant opportunities: to change, try alternative paths, find smoother answers to your goals. It makes life less stressful, when living openly in this manner.

I have also discovered that with enough will and enough determination many impossible things become real, yet in this path the world will push back, cracking our soul, aging us till we fit properly within a newer balance. Force always reacts back with an equal force.

So in this, I have found it to be a truer path by flowing actions with the world. Let the world itself assist you in the endeavor of your plans. This way, when the world uses force against you, then ironically that force can be redirected back to empower your actions.

In the end, I still *plan* all the time, but the trick is not getting overly attached to those plans. This permits a flowing process of change from plan to plan or from plan to happenstance, or happenstance to plan: life and I just shift along. At times I still get attached to a few plans, but I have learned to pick and choose those times carefully to match the needs of my spirit.

1) Often times, since we misunderstand our own intentions, we ourselves end up in direct opposition of our own expectations. Our own conflicting expectations often cancel out, causing personal failures in overly forced actions.

While living to your expectations doesn't go against the Tao per se, it is as opposite to the Tao as I can define. Expectations are a methodology to force the world to fit to your mold, compared to the typical Taoist response of accepting / flowing along with the world as it happens. Yet each Personal Tao is unique, meaning for some, it's in their nature to hammer the world into an expectation. Typically I have noticed these individuals tend to be the most amazingly fantastic builders/creators equally counter-balanced with discontentment over the products of their life. These are the individuals constantly on the move to hammer down yet another outstanding flaw or problem, never to discover completion, as their contentment comes from the chase of perfection itself. This, in turn, ends up being their Personal Tao.

Living to expectation limits the nature of the Tao, to self imagination. Imagination is powerful, but we have definite limits. As much as I can imagine, or as much as a single person could express, an infinitely larger realm exists outside of how we each define life. Living to expectations, limits a person to a very small slice of what is available to live. Even worse, people lead ever diminishing lives when basing personal self worth upon their expectations. Is "*self worth*" a unit of production?¹ If expectations are rarely met, how does it reflect within our personal self value or upon our relationships based purely upon expectation? Living to expectation ends up leaving quite a few people unfulfilled, leading very limited lives.

1) The consumer society has an interesting twist to this expectation puzzle. The consumer society manages expectations by teaching people that contentment is something purchased at wholesale. The majority of the United States' economy is based on a pyramid scheme of expectations within an "*American dream*" to be materially well off and comfortable.

I am often asked how can one live free of expectations.

The answer is to dream a thousand dreams. I reveal these dreams to myself and over time to others. This confuses people as they mistake these dreams as statements of action, as something I will do. I suppose the dreams are presented to others in a matter of fact form, a proto plan, like placing a seed into the soil to grow. Dreams and seeds are very similar. Dreams require a mixture of your own essence and outside reality to germinate. In this sense, your soul is the soil, and speaking the dream aloud is to blow a spark of life that others help fertilize. These are the conditions to germinate a strong dream. Many dreams will not grow, but some will reach for the sky, and those end up as the bean stalks upon which legends are fed.

Some would say this is setting intention, but closer to the mark, this is placing your spirit truthfully into the dream. As many dreams strangely become a reality for myself, people seemingly expect this is who I am, that the dream was my path, my expected destination. Not the case! As dreams shift, no dream can be a whole statement; in fact they almost always shift in time, randomly, meaning I end up doing something other than the original idea or dream itself. I haven't changed, nothing has changed; I merely unfolded with the plan, with the dream as it happened. Yet the expectations that others had of my life were broken, since it didn't follow a pre-determined course of action. How could it? It started as dream, which got bounced around by others, layering additional dimensions. The world buffets it around, then suddenly everything is placed in a position where another dream is a closer fit, and the whole process starts again taking everyone wonderfully along for the ride.

Most of the time, as the world knows of my dreams, the world and my friends help some of these dreams become true. More often the case, dreams remain a dream and it passes quickly by as a pleasant daydream. Other times old dreams reawaken and become reality, simply because everything takes a while to align. Having had the dreams, having told others, allows a long lever of time, of the years, to work in my favor; it permits me to notice when everything is right. Then when it all feels right, to then leap the dream into reality.

This is a question of style. Some of us are built out of brick and mortar; solid engineered perfection. Others of us float to our dreams; ever shifting to the whims, the currents, the clouds. The challenge is to avoid getting trapped by expectations while permitting plans and dreams to flow freely to your needs.

Cuttings



Not all flowers bloom, lying on the cutting room floor.
A person will not touch a Personal Tao by cutting oneself down.

Speaking Out

This isn't poetry of the page
This is... is this?. This is...
Me reaching out to gently touch you

I have been looking for my voice

In their voice my voice stuttering, other voices merging to
shouts uttering muttering confusion
jamming my words
leaving world noise crashing into me
It shuts me down

Everyone pretends
to be something else
People trying to be: loudest, sweetest, prettiest, smartest
est est est, always est
pretending to be est

I have been looking for my voice
to get attention
my voice trying to be someone else
Being taught to make noise is to feel alive
Pretending to be
est, smoothest, est coolest, est est est
Those est actions might speak louder than words
but they aren't me

I don't want
noise
I want, to float
Words like wind, to move, just to move
I need my voice to reach out... as me

To find my voice
I will change the rules
shift the world
with gentle words
lift the world
so you might hear what I have to say

I have been looking for my voice
Because without it
I am alone

I am not alone
Speaking now quietly
It becomes possible to hear... you
Its hearing you...
You hearing me...
In sharing
That alone goes away

In sharing...
I found my voice

Why live pretending to be someone else?

To learn of myself, I explored spoken word¹ poetry. On one level, becoming a spoken word poet was an interesting choice, as later I remembered, oh yah: I have this lisp. I know I have a lisp, but it doesn't define me to me. Others might define me slightly to it, but I never thought anything of it, even when my parents tried to force me to change through 6 months of speech therapy. I just ignored it and kept myself with lisp and all. I saw no reason to change it. Over the years the lisp has relaxed quite a bit, but it's a part of me and while I never hear my lisp, at times I remember and smile knowing it's there to distinctly mark me. It's funny, I remember being eight years old and purposely making the decision to keep the lisp. I knew it was wrong to have others tell me how I should define myself.

When I hear my voice, it's a beautiful deep clear voice. Of course when I listen to my voice on a tape recorder, well, it's a slightly blurred ordeal, a bit nasal and not at all me: it's just a tape recorder after all. Yet that's how others initially hear me. Over time people hear my inner voice also, so it balances out with patience.

The importance of my becoming a spoken word artist was to learn how to focus an experience into a coherent topic for direct communication with others². My written-word poetry in comparison was turned inward for self communication. Over time my poetry has merged into combining aspects of both spoken word and written word. The spoken word poetry tends to expose my actions and feelings to the world (body and spirit), while the written poetry moves with the spinning of my mind. Combining these two forms helps me discover a more complete expression of my own nature.

The lesson I learned from being both a spoken and written word artist is how we are each a poem of our own personal expression. Our portraits glimmer from many different angles of expression. Finding ourselves is as much a matter of speaking out loud, as to think and accept what we feel inside. We have to speak to be heard, for silent we only take upon our internal meaning, and the corresponding nature that others will assign to us.

Read the poems in the book aloud and within your mind and you will discover different meanings in each poem. The poem in this section especially calls out to be read aloud to a mirror, to an audience. Discover that your own nature calls out to be spoken for.

- 1) Spoken word poetry is quite different than written poetry. The word choices and grammar are changed entirely for verbal impact. When spoken, the poet mixes in body language for additional meaning. The words tend to be very exposing while nuances are carried thru voice tone. Another difference is that the mental medium is quite different: a listening mind interprets language differently than the mind which reads a poem. Overall the spoken word style is a very vibrant, dynamic performance art which reveals our humanity in raw and cutting angles. Performing spoken word becomes a disturbingly honest opening of one's soul revealed for all to see and hear. When done to form, it isn't acting; it is performance art of a very personal nature.
- 2) If someone else cannot understand my writing, then it is often true that I don't truly understand my poetry.

Mantra

The sound of our soul, echo's in our breath.

===== Thoughts =====

A mantra is a simple harmony. Mantras are statements, sounding out of ourselves, repeated, repeating, spun outward into vibration, repeating ever again until a connection to understanding occurs.

Right now you are working upon a mantra.

The greatest mantra is one we all have, each and every day, hundreds, upon thousands of countless statements, which we call...

Breath

Breath itself is the personal mantra of our life. 20,000 times day, a person tells the world in whispers, sighs, shouts, words, gasps, breathing in and out: the mantra of their life, twenty thousand times a day:

Breath

This mantra is our nature:

Do you take a breath, a deep breath to relax within?

In road rage, do you shout slapping breaths of "Fuck you"?

Ever hit yourself in a sharp intake of breath?

What is the beat of your breath when pushing yourself?

Do you taste the scent of spring upon an inhalation?

Each instance, each breath is our personal mantra expressing our nature. To reveal yourself, pay attention to this personal mantra. More powerfully make it a practice, learning to work with your breath; improving and actually experiencing the statement of your life. Many practices exist to help a person focus in how breath moves life along. Practices of breathing might surprise you; it isn't all Yoga and Taoist ways. As an example, I discovered becoming a spoken word artist that learning to speak aloud my poetry was also my personal discovery of how to express and live within the breath of speaking aloud my nature. You can be your own guide, in learning to live within breath.

The start of any breathing practice is simple: understand that your breath is with you at this very moment. Take the first step in, *feel*, knowing life moves relative to the inner metronome tempo that's within breath itself.



===== Paths =====

It doesn't take the last breath of life to discover your personal mantra.
Why do people express wishes upon a dying breath....
When within life, we each have 20,000 chances a day to make those wishes true?

For some, 20,000 chances a day is a bit overwhelming to ponder. So my path is simple: It only takes one breath, one action timed within the breath, to make a wish come true. Take the time to notice and act upon a breath once a day, once a month, once in a while: all these actions do add up to make a difference.

It just means not using your last breath to do so.

Endings

Writing this book's first ending, *Closings*, was a major life changing moment: I had finally managed to grasp a Personal Tao. After finishing it, I had friends review the work. One friend cried upon reading it, another friend read the last section and crossed it out. The range of response surprised me. Yet more importantly I laughed seeing the crossed out page as it illustrates how personal the Tao is for each of us.

I firmly feel the ending here is for others to create. Each person experimenting, jotting down notes to consider, taking the time which is life, to discover their Personal Tao...

Over time I will post closing sections from others upon the web site.

I sincerely hope this book is of some assistance to you, as it has been for me.

...

/ A gentle bow \

Namaste

Personal Closings

Within time, i shall fade away
closing eyes to softly go

Within time, i shall fly away
closing eyes merging so

Within time, i shall be free
closing myself; tasting alit darkness

Within time, everything clears
closing eyes slowly opening

Within time: beginning to ending
opening senses enfold completeness

Within time, i shall be newly born
opening myself, revealing me

Within myself, becoming eternal
{softly merging darkness}
opening completely
revealing me

...

This is an intensely personal poem of self reflection¹. So while the poem conveys a seemingly outside Taoist appearance; for me, the poem embeds hidden depression, damselflies, fireflies, forested streams, personal breakings, personal acceptance and the connections within life which forms a person's core. The dual nature of the poem combines with the following story:

As a child I would close my eyes
Discovering a place of no thought, no action, no feeling
Into a place of completeness and nothingness
... Revealing the Tao ...

As an adult I close my eyes
Having the sun enwrap me in a breeze of peace
Touching
Life across time: of all moments, which touch upon me
Touching upon a larger eternal nature
discovering²
I can merge this into a vocalization of feelings, of understanding
... of **my** Personal Tao ...

... Acceptance mixing with wonder ...

**To be alive is to touch wonder
Weaving acceptance in my swirling nature**

...

1) This page is a personal ending purely for me ☺, coming to closure with my Personal Tao.

2) Sorry, no diagrams, no connecting of dots, only results, as at times a leap is required for reaching a conclusion.