

Spirituality & Community

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www.spiritualityandcommunity.com



Taoism **Zhuangzi**

Sacred
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The Seven Symphonies
Kaushal Aras

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Who We Are

www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

Welcome! Seeking spiritual fulfillment? True happiness and mental wellness? Well, that's what we're all about. Spirituality & Community is a magazine, web site, and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. ***We are dedicated to promoting spirituality, true happiness, mental wellness, and appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.***

A New Age of Light

Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment. We are concerned with what lies within the heart. ***We believe that within everyone lies a pure love that we call the Light or the Lord within. We believe that one must open one's heart to the Light to attain spiritual fulfillment and that only this brings true happiness and mental wellness.*** The Light is the essence of humanity. ***Ultimately, we find our way by casting our gaze inward.*** We will search this inner world over until we find our home:

***We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding***

We believe that mankind is entering a new age, an Age of Light. We see a growing spiritual crisis in the world today. Our culture has brought us unprecedented material well being, but we seem further away than ever from true spiritual wholeness. We also perceive an increase in mental health issues in our society and believe this to be linked to spiritual detachment. Many wander endlessly in search of the material gratification that will bring them happiness. Many have lost faith in religions and traditions. Others sincerely believe in traditional religions but remain unfulfilled spiritually and unhappy. Unfortunately, too many are so close-minded they refuse to ask what is missing from their lives. Yet, many hunger for spiritual wholeness and are searching for answers. ***We believe that we are entering a new age of enlightenment in which genuine spiritual progress will be made and that spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.*** An appreciation for diversity of belief provides us with a fresh view of the beliefs of others, allows us to take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and enables us to synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. When we view the beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. We look with the highest regard to traditional beliefs and religions for guidance, and we also look forward. ***We believe that the past is not the end but the beginning.***



What We Do

Spirituality & Community produces a magazine and encompasses an online community. Both aspects serve as the basis for bringing together those who share our aspirations and beliefs, to meet each other and exchange ideas. We provide many opportunities for exploring spirituality and communicating with others:

- Spirituality & Community magazine*
- Features on the site*
- Online chats* (as interest arises)

The magazine is based on a Reader's Digest® type model. It is comprised primarily of reader submitted material. It is the primary mechanism for a member to both explore spirituality and communicate his or her ideas to others. Features are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. *We sincerely hope that you will find truth within, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!*

Zhuangzi

(Chuang-tzu, Kwang-dze)
(excerpts)

Translated by James Legge
(1891)

Taoism

Zhuangzi is thought to have been a Chinese Taoist that lived circa 350 BC. He is also a character in the works attributed to him. The works are among the

most influential Taoist writings besides the Tao Te Ching. Taoism is a philosophy and religion focused on finding the “way”. The Tao or “way” is the natural way of the universe; it also exists within. Taoists believe we may find the true way of the universe by knowing ourselves. According to the Taoists, one can find the Tao only by acting without acting (wu wei) and knowing without knowing (P’u). In the following excerpt, the Tao is referred to as “The Store of Light”. Zhuangzi appears to say that although we should follow the Tao, we are inherently incapable of knowing very much about its true nature. He says that the deeper we go in trying to explain it, the more deceived we become. He seems to suggest that in fact, all our thoughts and perceptions about the world are illusions or are equivalent to illusions. This view of Taoism appears to be very close to Buddhism, particularly Zen Buddhism. The following excerpt is from Legge’s Sacred Books of the East, Volume 39, Part I. For more, see: www.sacred-texts.com/tao/index.htm.

Book II: The Adjustment of Controversies

7. The Tào at first met with no responsive recognition. Speech at first had no constant forms of expression. Because of this there came the demarcations (of different views). Let me describe those demarcations:--they are the Left and the Right; the Relations and their Obligations; Classifications and their Distinctions; Emulations and Contentions. These are what are called 'the Eight Qualities.' Outside the limits of the world of men, the sage occupies his thoughts, but does not discuss about anything; inside those limits he occupies his thoughts, but does not pass any judgments. In the Khun Khiû, which embraces the history of the former kings, the sage indicates his judgments, but does not argue (in vindication of them). Thus it is that he separates his characters from one another without appearing to do so, and argues without the form of argument. How does he do so? The sage cherishes his views in his own breast, while men generally state theirs argumentatively, to show them to others. Hence we have the saying, 'Disputation is a proof of not seeing clearly.'

The Great Tào does not admit of being praised. The Great Argument does not require words. Great Benevolence is not (officially) benevolent. Great Disinterestedness does not vaunt its humility. Great Courage is not seen in stubborn bravery.



Three Laughing Men by the Tiger Stream

Song Dynasty, depicting that Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are one

The Tào that is displayed is not the Tào. Words that are argumentative do not reach the point. Benevolence that is constantly exercised does not accomplish its object. Disinterestedness that vaunts its purity is not genuine. Courage that is most stubborn is ineffectual. These five seem to be round (and complete), but they tend to become square (and immovable). Therefore the knowledge that stops at what it does not know is the greatest. Who knows the argument that needs no words, and the Way that is not to be trodden?

He who is able to know this has what is called 'The Heavenly Treasure-house.' He may pour into it without its being filled; he may pour from it without its being exhausted; and all the while he does not know whence (the supply) comes. This is what is called 'The Store of Light.'

Therefore of old Yâo asked Shun, saying, 'I wish to smite (the rulers of) Zung, Kwei, and Hsü-âo. Even when standing in my court, I cannot get them out of my mind. How is it so?' Shun replied, 'Those three rulers live (in their little states) as if they were among the mugwort and other brushwood;--how is it that you cannot get them out of your mind? Formerly, ten suns came out together, and all things were illuminated by them;--how much should (your) virtue exceed (all) suns!'

8. Nieh Khüeh asked Wang Î, saying, 'Do you know, Sir, what all creatures agree in approving and affirming?' 'How should I know it?' was the reply. 'Do you know what it is that you do not know?' asked the other again, and he got the same reply. He asked a third time,--'Then are all creatures thus without knowledge?' and Wang Î answered as before, (adding however), 'Notwithstanding, I will try and explain my meaning. How do you know that when I say "I know it," I really (am showing that) I do not know it, and that when I say "I do not know it," I really am showing that I do know it.' And let me ask you some questions:--'If a man sleep in a damp place, he will have a pain in his loins, and half his body will be as if it were dead; but will it be so with an eel? If he be living in a tree, he will be frightened and all in a tremble; but will it be so with a monkey? And does any one of the three know his right place? Men eat animals that have been fed on grain and grass; deer feed on the thickset grass; centipedes enjoy small snakes; owls and crows delight in mice; but does any one of the four know the right taste? The dog-headed monkey finds its mate in the female gibbon; the elk and the axis deer cohabit; and the eel enjoys itself with other fishes. Mâu Zhiang and Lî Kî were accounted by men to be most beautiful, but when fishes saw them, they dived deep in the water from them; when birds, they flew from them aloft; and when deer saw them, they separated and fled away. But did any of these four know which in the world is the right female attraction? As I look at the matter, the first principles of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of approval and disapproval are inextricably mixed and confused together:--how is it possible that I should know how to discriminate among them?'

Nieh Khüeh said (further), 'Since you, Sir, do not know what is advantageous and what is hurtful, is the Perfect man also in the same way without the knowledge of them?' Wang i replied, 'The Perfect man is spirit-like. Great lakes might be boiling about him, and he would not feel their heat; the Ho and the Han might be frozen up, and he would not feel the cold; the hurrying thunderbolts might split the mountains, and the wind shake the ocean, without being able to make him afraid. Being such, he mounts on the clouds of the air, rides on the sun and moon, and rambles at ease beyond the four seas. Neither death nor life makes any change in him, and how much less should the considerations of advantage and injury do so!'

9. Khü Zhiào-dze asked Khang-wû Dze, saying, 'I heard the Master (speaking of such language as the following):--"The sagely man does not occupy himself with worldly affairs. He does not put himself in the way of what is profitable, nor try to avoid what is hurtful; he has no pleasure in seeking (for anything from any one); he does not care to be found in (any established) Way; he speaks without speaking; he does not speak when he speaks; thus finding his enjoyment outside the dust and dirt (of the world)." The Master considered all this to be a shoreless flow of mere words, and I consider it to describe the course of the Mysterious Way.--What do you, Sir, think of it?' Khang-wû dze replied, 'The hearing of such words would have perplexed even Hwang-Tî, and how should Khiû be competent to understand them? And you, moreover, are too hasty in forming your estimate (of their meaning). You see the egg, and (immediately) look out for the cock (that is to be hatched from it); you see the bow, and (immediately) look out for the dove (that is to be brought down by it) being roasted. I will try to explain the thing to you in a rough way; do you in the same way listen to me.

'How could any one stand by the side of the sun and moon, and hold under his arm all space and all time? (Such language only means that the sagely man) keeps his mouth shut, and puts aside questions that are uncertain and dark; making his inferior capacities unite with him in honouring (the One Lord). Men in general bustle about and toil; the sagely man seems stupid and to know nothing. He blends ten thousand years together in the one (conception of time); the myriad things all pursue their spontaneous course, and they are all before him as doing so.

'How do I know that the love of life is not a delusion? and that the dislike of death is not like a young person's losing his way, and not knowing that he is (really) going home? Lî Kî was a daughter of the border Warden of Ai. When (the ruler of) the state of Zin first got possession of her, she wept till the tears wetted all the front of her dress. But when she came to the place of the king, shared with him his luxurious couch, and ate his grain-and-grass-fed meat, then she regretted that she had wept. How do I know that the dead do not repent of their former craving for life?

'Those who dream of (the pleasures of) drinking may in the morning wail and weep; those who dream of wailing and weeping may in the morning be going out to hunt. When they were dreaming they did not know it was a dream; in their dream they may even have tried to interpret it; but when they awoke they knew that it was a dream. And there is the great awaking, after which we shall know that this life was a great dream. All the while, the stupid think they are awake, and with nice discrimination insist on their knowledge; now playing the part of rulers, and now of grooms. Bigoted was that Khiû! He and you are both dreaming. I who say that you are dreaming am dreaming myself. These words seem very strange; but if after ten thousand ages we once meet with a great sage who knows how to explain them, it will be as if we met him (unexpectedly) some morning or evening.

10. 'Since you made me enter into this discussion with you, if you have got the better of me and not I of you, are you indeed right, and I indeed wrong? If I have got the better of you and not you of me, am I indeed right and you indeed wrong? Is the one of us right and the other wrong? are we both right or both wrong? Since we cannot come to a mutual and common understanding, men will certainly continue in darkness on the subject.

'Whom shall I employ to adjudicate in the matter? If I employ one who agrees with you, how can he, agreeing with you, do so correctly? And the same may be said, if I employ one who agrees with me. It will be the same if I employ one who differs from us both or one who agrees with us both. In this way I and you and those others would all not be able to come to a mutual understanding; and shall we then wait for that (great sage)? (We need not do so.) To wait on others to learn how conflicting opinions are changed is simply like not so waiting at all. The harmonising of them is to be found in the invisible operation of Heaven, and by following this on into the unlimited past. It is by this method that we can complete our years (without our minds being disturbed).

'What is meant by harmonising (conflicting opinions) in the invisible operation of Heaven? There is the affirmation and the denial of it; and there is the assertion of an opinion and the rejection of it. If the affirmation be according to the reality of the fact, it is certainly different from the denial of it:--there can be no dispute about that. If the assertion of an opinion be correct, it is certainly different from its rejection:--neither can there be any dispute about that. Let us forget the lapse of time; let us forget the conflict of opinions. Let us make our appeal to the Infinite, and take up our position there.'

11. The Penumbra asked the Shadow, saying, 'Formerly you were walking on, and now you have stopped; formerly you were sitting, and now you have risen up:--how is it that you are so without stability?' The Shadow replied, 'I wait for the movements of something else to do what I do, and that something else on which I wait waits further on another to do as it does. My waiting,--is it for the scales of a snake, or the wings of a cicada? How should I know why I do one thing, or do not do another?'

'Formerly, I, Kwang Kâu, dreamt that I was a butterfly, a butterfly flying about, feeling that it was enjoying itself I did not know that it was Kâu. Suddenly I awoke, and was myself again, the veritable Kâu. I did not know whether it had formerly been Kâu dreaming that he was a butterfly, or it was now a butterfly dreaming that it was Kâu. But between Kâu and a butterfly there must be a difference. This is a case of what is called the Transformation of Things.'

Sacred

Hrvoje Butkovic

I take great pleasure in rummaging through history to uncover our shining moments and familiarise myself with developments that demonstrate the greatness of the human spirit. I don't know whether it is my natural inclination towards optimism or my belief in the goodness of the human nature that is driving this search. Whatever the cause, it gives me hope that, as a species, we have the capacity to create the kind of life here on Earth that we can presently only dream of.

My biased viewpoint reveals a progression away from daily barbarism towards a society that values the life and the wellbeing of all of its members. I need look no further back than the medieval period to get a sense of how much we have grown.

Class division was firmly entrenched in the social consciousness then; now we have laws that aim to ensure equality of opportunity. Death by torture was the preferred method for disposing of people of different ideological persuasion, with eager crowds joining in the spectacle; now it must take place in secret to avoid a public outcry. The very notion of human rights was alien to the times; now they constitute the fundamental guideline for governing society.

This favourable comparison makes it all the more distressing to look at how our relationship with nature has changed over the same period. Or rather, how it has stayed the same. Try as I might, I struggle to spot a similarly rosy progression from callousness and cruelty to respect and compassion.

True, we have attempted to prevent cruelty to animals, the pollution of their habitat and their extinction by passing laws to this effect. Some of us have even engaged in protests and boycotts in attempts to force the issue. Unfortunately, these practices still continue, sometimes in the open, and often on the very largest, industrial scale. The bottom line is that the needs of our economy and our lifestyle take precedence over animal welfare.

We need to look no further than factory farming for an example. Here, we force livestock to endure severely cramped and crowded living conditions, in a completely artificial environment devoid of stimulation, fed on a diet unnatural to them, all for the sake of driving down the cost of food production. It was learning about these farming practices that led me to become a vegan, a diet that, incidentally, is considerably more affordable, both materially and emotionally.

As unnerving as learning about factory farming was, it was the animal fur farming, with its practice of skinning animals alive, that really shook me to the core. It reminded

me of the method of torture that was popular in the Balkans while under Turkish occupation, where a person would be impaled on a pole that was then planted in the ground, and left to die. I could still understand it if it were motivated by pure hatred. To do this out of sheer indifference to the animals' suffering is simply mind-boggling.

This is not to say that this kind of cruelty to animals is anything new. Reports from 16th century England also talk about farm animals living in cramped conditions and being subjected to mutilation. And the age-old French tradition of fattening up geese by force-feeding them is still practiced in rural Croatia, where I grew up.

How did it happen that we have succeeded at eliminating torture as the standard method for dealing with people of different religious and political persuasion, even abolished dehumanising social practices such as slavery and denigration of women, yet have struggled to let even a glimmer of these developments filter down to other species with whom we share this world?

We go to great lengths to respect the integrity of the human body. The lifesaving act of organ donation, for example, cannot be performed without the written consent of its owner, even when that owner is deceased. Given such high standards of care, why do we then have so much trouble respecting the integrity of the animal body while the animal is still alive?

I don't have a ready answer to these questions. Still, I'm tempted to attribute this behaviour to a line of thought that can be traced back to classical Greek philosophers, which claims that animals exist for human sake rather than their own. This view was reinforced by the spread of Christianity and its additional claim that, as the pinnacle of God's creation, humans are separate from nature rather than a part of it. While the latter claim has lost ground to science and the Theory of Evolution, their emphasis on competition and survival of the fittest has only bolstered our resolve to subdue nature to our ends. It is a role befitting a species that has won the evolutionary struggle against its competitors.

Watching the destructive effects of this attitude unfold around us moves me to embrace a very different outlook, one that has more in common with Eastern religious thought and especially the perspective of our tribal ancestors. They saw themselves as neither separate from the world they lived in nor superior to it. It is a deeply spiritual view, one that treats every living being, and ideally everything that exists, as *sacred*.

This view is alien to our culture. It raises some serious concerns, and rightly so. Aborigine societies that hold it have harmonised themselves with their environment so well that they saw no reason to change it. They neither developed technology nor expanded their understanding of the world through rational enquiry. Religious ascetics who adopted this view went to extreme lengths to avoid harming other creatures,

refraining from eating root vegetables and sweeping the path ahead so as to avoid stepping on bugs and other creatures as they walked.

How do we gain knowledge of the world we live in if we cannot dissect it to uncover its inner working? What use is treating all life as sacred if it paralyses our own?

A reverential attitude towards nature need not have these effects. We are not starting from a blank slate, where any behaviour appears as appetising as any other. Our history is one of callousness and short-term self-interest. We cannot suddenly drop the established pattern of thinking and replace it with another. It takes time, years or decades even, to remake ourselves in a different light.

What the reverential attitude can do is supply us with a new vision. It can provide guidance on the journey, not to force debilitating changes that we have no desire to make, but to suggest worthwhile changes that we wouldn't otherwise think of making.

It can prompt us to interrupt the habitual swatting of a fly to admire its flight in all its majesty, to appreciate the exquisite beauty of a tulip before we thoughtlessly end its life for a day's display, or to notice the sincere and undemanding love of a dog that we so easily take for granted. This awareness nudges us to find beauty and meaning where we wouldn't have ordinarily thought to look.

With time, it can open our eyes to see value in untouched land instead of having to possess and develop it to give it worth. It can help us notice the humanity in an animal that we may now think of as food or fur, and teach us to share in its joy and feel its pain as our own. And it can awaken us to the wonder of being nourished by a ripe piece of fruit, knowing that we have not harmed the fruit tree in the process nor taken anything from it that it wasn't willing to give.

This gentle living may seem like weakness or self-deprivation to our present eyes. It is the act of taking the first tentative steps in this direction that helps our vision clear. Then we can see that the ability to exercise power over nature is a meagre substitute for being able to exercise it over ourselves.

The willingness to let the most insignificant creature live speaks of human magnificence more than the power to bring down the mightiest beast. Like the woodcutters who competed with each other at cutting down the giant redwood trees in an effort to show off their skill, it just leaves the world a poorer place for everyone. Enthusiasm to nourish its riches makes for a grander statement than any attempt at dominion can ever be.

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For more, see: <http://fluffygroovy.com>

The Seven Symphonies

Kaushal Aras

“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”- Rumi

Extraordinary Love is the ability to love for the sake of love itself. This ability to radiate extraordinary love in our lives requires a paradigm shift in how we love that can fundamentally transform every relationship that we know and is the essence of my book, *The Seven Symphonies of Extraordinary Love*. Unless, we are willing to shift the context or the paradigm that we operate in about love, any actions we undertake will lead to only a variation of the past.

Extraordinary Love is not simply an emotion, a feeling, or a body sensation. It is awareness, consciousness and a way of Being. It is a conscious choice to love without conditions. You love another person simply for the sake of love, and not because of a special circumstance, or to fulfill our needs or attributes that they demonstrate. One makes an extraordinary choice to love extraordinarily.

In the context of everyday living and loving, I’ve observed seven different ways, seven different roles through which we relate to others with extraordinary love. These roles are: parent-child, friend-sibling, student-teacher, lover-beloved, man-community, husband-wife, and self-higher self. My book, *The Seven Symphonies of Extraordinary Love*, provides a blueprint for creating peace within and without. Incorporating this knowledge into our consciousness enables us to flavor every endeavor of life with harmony, peace and happiness.

1. **The symphony of unconditional sacrifice (Parent-Child):** Despite how grown up and successful we become, part of us always remains a little child in our parent’s eyes. They may not have had the right tools or know-how to express this unconditional love for us in a skillful manner, but a parent never stops loving their child. By opening our heart to our parents we remove the barriers to experience the extraordinary love they have for us.
2. **The symphony of friendship and unlimited generosity (Friend-Sibling):** A true friendship is a treasure worth in gold. As the saying goes, a friend is someone who knows the music in our heart, and can render the composition back to us even when we doubt our own melody. As we navigate through the ebb and flow of life, we need to be willing to accept the gifts from our friends, for doing so provides them with the gift of giving. No matter what level of success we achieve, we won’t do it by ourselves. We need others to help us along the way, and it becomes our loving responsibility to pay it forward.
3. **The symphony of obedience (Teacher-Student):** The covenant between a disciple and master requires respect and obedience. What follows is an awakening of knowledge.

Humility allows wisdom to flow. Acknowledging our teacher's greatness breaks down the walls of ignorance and ego. Obedience to the master removes any blocks that keep us from leading a life of our highest potential. The heart that is open to such love of obedience is magnanimous, understanding and compassionate towards all beings.

4. **The symphony of true romance (Lover-Beloved):** True romance requires that one surrender completely to the agony and ecstasy of love. To feel the sweet pain and exultation of spirit is better than no love at all. Extraordinary love in this context of true romance is a communion, a complete surrender, a dance, an art, a supreme expression of beauty.
5. **The symphony of community and humanity (Man-Community):** Consider our individual significance as a human being doesn't come from material successes but as a result of self-actualization. When we embody the true meaning of community and harmony in the core of our Being, we become intoxicated with love. Community means coming together in unity, and humanity is the essence of oneness. Community love is accepting others with compassion.
6. **The symphony of devotion (Husband-Wife):** Devotional love is giving of self through thoughts, feeling and deeds with complete surrender. This is the art of conscious loving with humility. When the feminine goddess merges with the masculine counterpart with such devotion and surrender, divine intimacy becomes available.
7. **The symphony of awareness (Self-Higher Self):** When love becomes our religion, nature acts as our scripture, and we begin to merge with the higher levels of consciousness. Meditating in this divine realm of consciousness then gives us the access to the eternal. A sense of oneness with our world engulfs us and we become present to the majesty of divinity in each of us. Extraordinary love becomes a way of Being, a natural expression.

When love is extraordinary, it imparts its perfume to the entire universe. Such extraordinary love cannot be concealed once it has been awakened within our heart.

~ Kaushal Aras

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Kaushal Aras is a writer, professional speaker, and a thought leader in the human potential movement sweeping our planet. He is redefining spirituality and success as a way of living by connecting to our higher self, to our collective heart, so we can transcend the barriers to Extraordinary Love and World Peace. Sign up for a free tele-seminar with Kaushal and download the free eBook version of *The Seven Symphonies of Extraordinary Love: A Blueprint for World Peace* at www.thesevensymphonies.com. To have Kaushal visit and speak at your next event or run a seminar for your company or community, please contact him directly or register for an upcoming workshop at www.kaushalaras.com.