

Spirituality & Community

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www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

All We Really Need to Know

The Leaves of Autumn



The Spirituality of Taoism

Excerpts from the Tao Te Ching

Ode to the West Wind
Percy Shelley

Crimson Hues

Contents

Who We Are	3
The Spirituality of Taoism Excerpts from the Tao Te Ching By Lao-Tzu	5
Spiritual Soup All We Really Need to Know By Kurt Venables	13
Spiritual Soup The Leaves of Autumn By Kurt Venables	14
Ode to the West Wind By Percy Shelley	16
Crimson Hues By Kurt Venables	18

Who We Are

www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

Origins

Spirituality & Community was founded in late 2003 by Kurt Venables to communicate with others who share an interest in spirituality and an appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.

Mission

We are dedicated to the spiritual development of our members and promoting spirituality and appreciation for the rich array of spiritual beliefs the world provides.

Foundations

Spirituality & Community is a magazine and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. We hold closely these fundamental truths:

- To find true happiness, one must open his or her heart to the pure goodness that lies deep within. We call this pure goodness the Good, the Light, and the Lord within.*
- The process of opening one's heart is a lifelong journey, which we call Spirituality.*

We distinguish between spirituality and religion. *Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment.* We are concerned with what lies within the heart. In religion, metaphysical and supernatural concepts are inextricably linked to spirituality, and you will find such religious concepts discussed here to the extent that the writer believes them to be entwined with spiritual topics. However, you will not find material written for the sole purpose of asserting, denying, or debating supernatural religious phenomena, whether they be associated with traditional religions or new age religions. Examples of such phenomena might include the existence of God, reincarnation, or extraterrestrials. It's not that we don't consider these to be worthy subjects; it's just that we believe that spirituality, the inner journey, is important in its own right, and that is our focus here.

We believe that true spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs. Among our highest values is open-mindedness. We do not require or expect others to accept the particular beliefs of any one of us. We believe that as we develop such an appreciation for diversity, our perspective shifts away from an "all or nothing" concept of spirituality, an approach that supposes that one must either wholly accept or utterly reject a particular set of spiritual beliefs. This perceptual shift allows us to view the beliefs of others from a fresh vantage point, take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. *We believe that spirituality may best be defined as a personal journey towards true happiness and spiritual fulfillment and that the beliefs of others serve to guide each of us on our own journey.* Our goals are the personal growth of each and every member and the promotion of spiritual values and respect for individuality.

We believe that when we view the spiritual beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. Truth shines all around us if we know how to see it. The truth we see in the spiritual beliefs of others guides each of us. It is in this vein that we wish this organization to be viewed. ***Through Spirituality & Community, we reveal our most intimate beliefs. We sincerely hope that some will find some truth within them, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!***

What We Do- Opportunities for Exploring Spirituality and Communication

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***
- Retreats*** (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 from the past several issues are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. An eventual goal is to organize retreats in major metropolitan areas to allow participants to meet each other and discuss issues face to face.

Membership in Spirituality & Community is free and may be withdrawn at any time. The magazine is also free. Level of participation in any aspect of Spirituality & Community is strictly voluntary.

The organization and site were launched only very recently. Currently, membership is very small- We are in growth mode right now. ***If you would like to join, please visit our web site and click the Join Us! link.***

Taoism

Excerpts from the Tao Te Ching, by Lao-Tzu
Translated by J.H. McDonald, 1996

The Tao Te Ching is generally regarded as the earliest major expression of Taoism and is widely believed to have been written in the sixth century B.C. by philosopher **Lao Tzu** (or “Old Sage”). For the complete translation: www.wam.umd.edu/~stwright/rel/tao/TaoTeChing.html



1

The tao that can be described
is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be spoken
is not the eternal Name.

The nameless is the boundary of Heaven and Earth.
The named is the mother of creation.

Freed from desire, you can see the hidden mystery.
By having desire, you can only see what is visibly real.

Yet mystery and reality
emerge from the same source.
This source is called darkness.

Darkness born from darkness.
The beginning of all understanding.

7

The Tao of Heaven is eternal,
and the earth is long enduring.
Why are they long enduring?
They do not live for themselves;
thus they are present for all beings.

The Master puts herself last;
And finds herself in the place of authority.
She detaches herself from all things;
Therefore she is united with all things.

She gives no thought to self.
She is perfectly fulfilled.

10

Nurture the darkness of your soul
until you become whole.
Can you do this and not fail?
Can you focus your life-breath until you become
supple as a newborn child?
While you cleanse your inner vision
will you be found without fault?
Can you love people and lead them
without forcing your will on them?
When Heaven gives and takes away
can you be content with the outcome?
When you understand all things
can you step back from your own understanding?

Giving birth and nourishing,
making without possessing,
expecting nothing in return.
To grow, yet not to control:
This is the mysterious virtue.

12

Five colors blind the eye.
Five notes deafen the ear.
Five flavors makes the palate go stale.
Too much activity deranges the mind.
Too much wealth causes crime.

The Master acts on what she feels and not what she sees.
She shuns the latter, and prefers to seek the former.

13

Success is as dangerous as failure,
and we are often our own worst enemy.

What does it mean that success is as dangerous as failure?
He who is superior is also someone's subordinate.
Receiving favor and loosing it both cause alarm.
That is what is meant by success is as dangerous as failure.
What does it mean that we are often our own worst enemy?

The reason I have an enemy is because I have "self".
If I no longer had a "self", I would no longer have an enemy.

Love the whole world as if it were your self;
then you will truly care for all things.

19

Forget about knowledge and wisdom,
and people will be a hundred times better off.
Throw away charity and righteousness,
and people will return to brotherly love.
Throw away profit and greed,
and there won't be any thieves.

These three are superficial and aren't enough
to keep us at the center of the circle, so we must also:

Embrace simplicity.
Put others first.
Desire little.

21

The greatest virtue you can have
comes from following only the Tao;
which takes a form that is intangible and evasive.

Even though the Tao is intangible and evasive,
we are able to know it exists.
Intangible and evasive, yet it has a manifestation.
Secluded and dark, yet there is a vitality within it.
It's vitality is very genuine.
Within it we can find order.

Since the beginning of time, the Tao has always existed.
It is beyond *existing* and *not existing* .
How do I know where creation comes from?
I look inside myself and see it.

27

A good traveler leaves no tracks,
and a skillful speaker is well rehearsed.
A good bookkeeper has an excellent memory,
and a well made door is easy to open and needs no locks.

A good knot needs no rope and it can not come undone.

Thus the Master is willing to help everyone,
and doesn't know the meaning of rejection.
She is there to help all of creation,
and doesn't abandon even the smallest creature.
This is called embracing the light.

What is a good person but a bad person's teacher?
What is a bad person but raw materiel for his teacher?
If you fail to honor your teacher or fail to enjoy your student,
you will become deluded no matter how smart you are.
It is the secret of prime importance.

33

Those who know others are intelligent;
those who know themselves are truly wise.
Those who master others are strong;
those who master themselves have true power.

Those who know they have enough are truly wealthy.

Those who persist will reach their goal.

Those who keep their course have a strong will.
Those who embrace death will not perish,
but have life everlasting.

38

The highest good is not to seek to do good,
but to allow yourself to become it.
The ordinary person seeks to do good things,
and finds that they can not do them continually.

The Master does not force virtue on others,
thus she is able to accomplish her task.
The ordinary person who uses force,
will find that they accomplish nothing.

The kind person acts from the heart,
and accomplishes a multitude of things.
The righteous person acts out of pity,
yet leaves many things undone.
The moral person will act out of duty,

and when no one will respond
will roll up his sleeves and uses force.

When the Tao is forgotten, there is righteousness.
When righteousness is forgotten, there is morality.
When morality is forgotten, there is the law.
The law is the husk of faith,
and trust is the beginning of chaos.

Our basic understandings are not from the Tao
because they come from the depths of our misunderstanding.
The master abides in the fruit and not in the husk.
She dwells in the Tao,
and not with the things that hide it.
This is how she increases in wisdom.

42

The Tao gave birth to One.
The One gave birth to Two.
The Two gave birth to Three.
The Three gave birth to all of creation.

All things carry Yin
yet embrace Yang.
They blend their life breaths
in order to produce harmony.

People despise being orphaned, widowed and poor.
But the noble ones take these as their titles.
In losing, much is gained,
and in gaining, much is lost.

What others teach I too will teach:
"The strong and violent will not die a natural death."

47

Without opening your door,
you can know the whole world.
Without looking out your window,
you can understand the way of the Tao.

The more knowledge you seek,
the less you will understand.

The Master understands without leaving,
sees clearly without looking,
accomplishes much without doing anything.

48

One who seeks knowledge learns something new every day.
One who seeks the Tao unlearns something new every day.
Less and less remains until you arrive at non-action.
When you arrive at non-action,
nothing will be left undone.

Mastery of the world is achieved
by letting things take their natural course.
You can not master the world by changing the natural way.

53

If I understood only one thing,
I would want to use it to follow the Tao.
My only fear would be one of pride.
The Tao goes in the level places,
but people prefer to take the short cuts.

If too much time is spent cleaning the house
the land will become neglected and full of weeds,
and the granaries will soon become empty
because there is no one out working the fields.
To wear fancy clothes and ornaments,
to have your fill of food and drink
and to waste all of your money buying possessions
is called the crime of excess.
Oh, how these things go against the way of the Tao!

56

Those who know do not talk.
Those who talk do not know.

Stop talking,
meditate in silence,
blunt your sharpness,
release your worries,
harmonize your inner light,
and become one with the dust.
Doing this is called the dark and mysterious identity.

Those who have achieved the mysterious identity
can not be approached, and they can not be alienated.
They can not be benefited nor harmed.
They can not be made noble nor to suffer disgrace.
This makes them the most noble of all under the heavens.

67

The world talks about honoring the Tao,
but you can't tell it from their actions.
Because it is thought of as great,
the world makes light of it.
It seems too easy for anyone to use.

There are three jewels that I cherish:
compassion, moderation, and humility.
With compassion, you will be able to be brave,
With moderation, you will be able to give to others,
With humility, you will be able to become a great leader.
To abandon compassion while seeking to be brave,
or abandoning moderation while being benevolent,
or abandoning humility while seeking to lead
will only lead to greater trouble.
The compassionate warrior will be the winner,
and if compassion is your defense you will be secure.
Compassion is the protector of Heavens salvation.

71

Knowing you don't know is wholeness.
Thinking you know is a disease.
Only by recognizing that you have an illness
can you move to seek a cure.

The Master is whole because
she sees her illnesses and treats them,
and thus is able to remain whole.

76

The living are soft and yielding;
the dead are rigid and stiff.
Living plants are flexible and tender;
the dead are brittle and dry.

Those who are stiff and rigid
are the disciple of death.
Those who are soft and yielding
are the disciples of life.

The rigid and stiff will be broken.
The soft and yielding will overcome.

Spiritual Soup

By Kurt Venables

All We Really Need to Know



My little girl, Samantha, started Kindergarten this past week. We sent her off with \$1.50 for lunch money and a pink backpack full of school supplies. She was so excited, and a little apprehensive. But she did fine. She's already made some new friends, and she tells us about learning to read, and art class, and music class, and PE, and a million other details. I think she really enjoys it. I think it was actually harder on my wife Tammy than my little girl. Tammy's used to having her around all day. My little boy, Blaine, misses her too. But everybody seems to be settling in now. Several years ago, a book was published called *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, by Robert Fulghum (a very good book). How true that is.

Along with her lunch money and backpack, one of the most important things we gave her to take to Kindergarten was our love. I love my little girl very much (and Blaine and Tammy). Sometimes I call Samantha my little princess. That's because I love her so much. The light is always in everyone, but the love we give to others is the hand that stokes the flame. The love Tammy and I give to Samantha teaches her that she is worthy of love. This is the basis of the self esteem that she will carry throughout her lifetime. It will give her the confidence and strength to grow and overcome adversity as she travels on her journey through life.

Our love also teaches her to love others. People learn by example, none more so than

children. By treating her with kindness and love, we teach her to treat others the same way. (Of course, we must teach that love is to be spread freely, not confined within fixed boundaries defined by self, family, community, ethnicity, etc.) The light is the essence of humanity; it will always exist within each of us. However, the love that is passed down from one generation to another and among people of a generation determines the strength of the fire, along with the choice each of us makes to open our hearts to the light or shut it out. Thus, the love that we give our children is not only the best hope for our individual children, but is in fact our best hope for the future of mankind.

My little girl went off to Kindergarten with a \$1.50 for lunch money and a pink backpack full of school supplies. She also carried the light shining bright within her- and my eternal love, for I shall always love my little princess. Like the final line of Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, that is all she knows, and all she needs to know.

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Spiritual Soup

By Kurt Venables

The Leaves of Autumn

I was sitting out in the backyard this past weekend (it is now late October). My little girl was coloring at the table on our patio, and our puppy was playing in the yard. The pup was chasing leaves as they fell off the trees, pouncing on them as they approached the ground. He got excited going after a bunch of them and bounded into the woods. I yelled after him, "Stay out of the woods, pup." Gold looked at me in amazement with a mouth full of leaves and sticks and said, "Out of the woods? But that's where all the good stuff is." OK, he didn't really say it (he's too polite to talk with his mouth full), but he looked like he wanted to say it.

Samantha was drawing a picture of the trees with crayons. She had trees with leaves of all colors- red, orange, yellow, purple, green. That's just how it looks around our house right now. Just beautiful. This time of year reminds me that overcoming limitations is key to spiritual development. How so? The trees lose their leaves and go dormant in preparation for the darkness and cold of winter. Yet humans have evolved past this limitation; some of us barely noticing the passing seasons as we live, work, and drive around in various heated and air conditioned spaces. Spiritually, those who fail to overcome their limitations also fail to develop, to evolve. In hearts that grow cold and dark, the beautiful leaves of the human soul fall to the ground and crumple into dust. These unfortunate souls are not dead; for life remains within, dormant. And this life can spring forward at any time, once the sun returns.

To keep our spiritual leaves from falling, or to quicken a rebirth, we must strive to overcome our limitations. One of the greatest of these is the arrogance of thinking that we already know everything and have no real limitations to work on. We can begin the journey of spiritual development only by accepting we are not perfect and by realizing that we always have much to learn. The fundamental limitation in human nature that dims the Light is selfishness. To progress spiritually, we must overcome selfishness; we must break down the boundaries that confine our love. Some care only for themselves, or their family, or their friends, etc. Spiritual development is coextensive with the development of love without boundaries, with the freeing of love. We must simply free our hearts of our mentally imposed limitations and our hearts will naturally love. Some have the attitude that life is too hard, that they have barely enough energy to worry about themselves, let alone others- others must take care of themselves. But such people short change only themselves by failing to progress spiritually. For others, selfishness is the product of arrogance, a need to feel "better" than others. This psychological game is designed to provide a sense of self-esteem (albeit corrupt), security (albeit false), and perhaps justify the hoarding of resources (although the arrogant often have far less than they imagine). Regardless, selfishness blackens the heart and shuts out the light. We should not feel bad about ourselves because we are not perfect. Life is a precious gift, and we should regard our own consciousness as profoundly wonderful.

And that wonder is easier to see the further down the spiritual road we travel. And there are many good things ahead.

Only by overcoming our limitations and learning to love can we evolve spiritually, free the Light to shine bright within our souls, and experience its joy and fulfillment. I wonder if there's a little girl and her puppy in some netherworld watching the leaves fall from human souls. Is she as sweet as my little princess? Does she see the beauty in the leaves, even with all their limitations, yet hope that they return again in spring?

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Percy Bysshe Shelley

Ode to the West Wind

I.

OWILD West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the spring shall blow
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odors plain and hill:
Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!

II.

Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,
Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
Of some fierce Mænad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge
Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might
Of vapors, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail, will burst: oh hear!

III.

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,
Beside a pumice isle in Baiæ's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,
All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know
Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!

IV.

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share
The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! if even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be
The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skyey speed
Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven
As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

V.

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is;
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an extinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Crimson Hues

By Kurt Venables

**The mountains in Autumn surround
Light plays and leaves soar
Sweet songs echo from the peaks
The eyes feast, but the soul more**

**Nature shines now in crimson hues
She paints each leaf with different strokes
Her rhythm, of a different drum
Upon her breath, our future floats**

**For beauty is truth
And joy is sanity
Behind her eyes-
The hope of humanity**