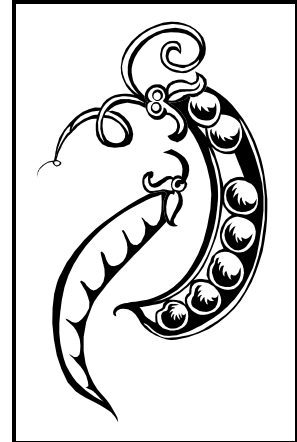


Simplicity

The more simple your life, the more time you have to live it.

A few years ago, a friend gave me a small figurine with this little quote attached. The Happy Buddha often elicits a natural smile. The deeper gift may be these few words, a small reminder during often busy, not so simple days.

Sitting with these words over the years, the meaning has deepened and found a resonant chord within. During retreat this year, a month-long sacred pause, a clear insight surfaced: simplicity allows for less obstacles that hinder a spontaneous, natural way of being, which is my translation of the *Tao* and *Taoism*. Nothing new, yet the echoes of this resonance have been strong ever since. I'm finding it easier to feel the natural way, the Tao, of many aspects of life following the guidance of simplicity. Letters arranged on paper can be inspiring. It is the practical application to our daily lives that gives words deeper value and meaning. Here are a few examples of how I find a simple approach helpful.



Simple Diet

How we nourish ourselves with food is often a complex topic. It is curious that the historically unprecedented availability of food year-round brings with it so many dilemmas about what to eat, or not eat. So many dietary approaches can become confusing: calorie counting, zero carbs, 80-10-10, Paleolithic, blood type, vegetarian, vegan, macrobiotic, raw. Following a program may distract from the simple, basic purpose of nourishing body, mind and spirit. Often, it can be helpful to bring mindfulness to what and why we eat.

Local - Seasonal - Whole

Any diet may be helpful, but usually the focus is on a very detailed managing of content based on what is considered right. I've found many diets to be useful in some ways, and not so useful in others. Relaxing a content-managing approach has brought me to some simpler basic guidelines: local, seasonal, and whole foods.

Local focuses on the foods that naturally grow in the environment in which we live, connecting to the energy of place. *Seasonal* follows a natural sequence of food types based on the energy of the current time. *Whole* guides me to choose less processed foods that retain more of their natural energy and balanced nutrition.

Food content is only one part of our diet. There are many other aspects to eating that influence nourishment. How fast I eat has consistently had more of an impact on digestion and assimilation than food content. Speed also relates to the amount of chewing for each mouthful.

Often, we're multitasking while eating: internet, texting, phone calls, meetings. What we do while we eat can significantly impact the digestive process. Over time, I've slowly phased out these activities as well as watching the news, reading newspapers and books. Just eating, being fully present with the food, the chewing, the swallowing. This leaves just this moment of eating and nourishment.

When we eat, how often, how early or late in the day, and how much time between meals is also very relevant. Not eating much in the morning and eating late at night may generate a cycle of undernourishment.

How much we eat, quantity, may also be as, or more, important than food content. Overloading the digestive system decreases its ability to function well.

Certainly we can pay attention to food content. It can also be useful to notice some of these other variables as well.

Simple Exercise

As with diets, there is an abundance of exercise methods, each with specific physical benefits: cardio,

strengthening, stretching, balance, flexibility. We could easily spend all of the week just following the 'required' times for each.



Do What You Enjoy

A simpler, and probably more effective, approach may be to find something we enjoy doing. It could be a traditional exercise like yoga, running or aerobics. Or, it could be something like dancing or gardening. Playing with kids can be a great form of exercise. Walking is the simplest and provides many benefits without the need for equipment, classes or a special place.

I've learned many exercise routines and most consistently do the simplest: a short 13 step tai chi form that takes five minutes and very little room to complete.

Simple Mind

Our minds also need regular care and attention. Again, there are a multitude of approaches: therapy, meditation, relaxation techniques, religion. Each promises a calmer, more peaceful mind. In my explorations I've found the simpler techniques tend to be most effective.

Smiling, to others and ourselves, is one of the most useful energy practices I've learned. Conscious breathing is a foundation of almost every meditation system. The Dalai Lama is often quoted, via bumper stickers, as saying "Kindness is my religion." Simple. Powerful. Effective. Sometimes the simplicity of daily life blends together in spontaneous ways. These activities don't have to be separate. Gentle stretching in the backyard on a warm, summer morning. Laying on the earth and breathing to the navel. Gazing up through the trees, branches and deep green leaves, shifting dawn colors and blue sky as background. Pausing in the garden to pick a snap pea, at just the right size, admiring the simple curves, full of morning crisp and sweetness. A simple life. Like this. The alchemy of these blended moments brings a joy that words struggle to fully convey.

'tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'tis the gift to come down where we ought to be, and when we find ourselves in the place just right, it will be in the valley of love and delight. - Traditional Shaker song

One suggestion for 'where we ought to be,' is the present moment. Whatever is happening in our lives, becomes a simple starting point.

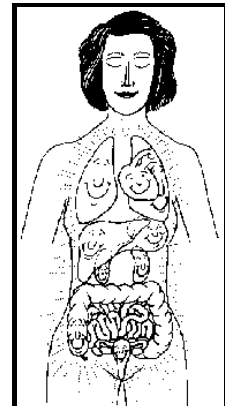
A simpler life brings us into the presence of that natural childlike state we were born into and which we are never really apart from. There may be times when it feels like a lengthy, insurmountable distance yet it is always within. This is not childish, with its negative slant of immaturity, but childlike wonder, curiosity and enjoyment of the moment without interest, concern or care for what has happened or what will happen next. Just this... this moment... this slice of life right in front of us. Much of Taoist philosophy can be summarized by the phrase: Return to being a child. Simplicity provides us this access.

Simple is Beautiful

E.F Schumacher wrote a book in 1973 titled *Small is Beautiful*. At the time, this concept was contrary to the general trend. Everything was getting bigger: economies, governments, cities, buildings, interstates, corporations. Bigger became better. Schumacher tried to remind us of the value and need for small, local and decentralized.

Simple is beautiful. One aspect of this beauty is access to a more natural life bringing along balance and harmony, which influence each aspect of our lives, every connection we have with nature, the earth, and people - our community.

In these times when the world seems more complicated and less easy to navigate than ever before, utilizing a simple approach can allow an unfolding into a more natural life. We don't have to withdraw from the world to do this, joining a monastery, becoming a hermit, moving to some small village way off the grid.



Embarking on a simpler life can begin with what is in front of us - right now. Whether it is parenting or gardening, work life or relationships, healing or singing, can we sit and feel for a simple, natural way of living/being that can illuminate each aspect as a gift, as a gateway to love and delight?

Another practical application example. I'm returning to the piano after a 40+ year pause. It is starting very simply with row, row, row your boat. And, twinkle, twinkle, little star. Sitting at the piano, simply, joy and delight.

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