

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Lao Tzu's Poetic, Philosophical Treatise

Tao Te Ching

Volume 8 of 14 (*Chapters 43-48*)

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Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Contents

Chapter 43.....	pg.	3
Chapter 44.....	pg.	13
Chapter 45.....	pg.	24
Chapter 46.....	pg.	34
Chapter 47.....	pg.	41
Chapter 48.....	pg.	48

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Tao Te Ching
chapter Forty-three

(43:1)

The gentlest thing
in the world
overcomes the hardest thing
in the world.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Might makes right?

We live in a world where we often see countries with great military and economic power overcoming, exploiting and harming those without power. It can look as if the path of yang prevails. However...

in West Hollywood, California, on the east side of Crescent Heights Boulevard, just a few meters north of the same Sunset Boulevard that was immortalized in Billy Wilder's film of the same name, the...

roots of the magnolia trees have lifted blocks of side walk, not mere inches but feet up, off their original placement at a rate only perceptible to glaciers. A tree, according...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

to all the measurements of contemporary science, is not sentient. It has no will, and no ability to contrive, no less execute, a plan. Yet, just by...

doing what evolution has selected its genes to do, quite noticeable things were accomplished.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(43:2)

That
which has NO substance
enters
where there is NO space.

(43:3)

This shows the value
of NON-action.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

NON-action

*In the interdependent universe in
which we dwell, everything effects everything, and
is effected by everything:*

*sometimes actually,
other times potentially,
sometimes directly,
other times circuitously,*

*sometimes overtly,
other times subtly,
sometimes immediately,
other times eventually. So...*

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

when considering the divide between yang and yin, the question is NOT one of if yang or yin could create change, BUT how. Yang acts decisively, in pursuit of a goal, in...

either a scattered or contrived manner. Yin is not scattered but rather centered; it does not act from contrived plans for it's acquiescent, and yields to...

the guidance that seems to be perceived or intuited from the state of centered spontaneity. Lao Tzu nicknamed the latter process "NON-action." It is the...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

*key to fulfilling ourselves and
benefiting the world, though our
yang-tendencies scream otherwise.*

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(43:4)

Teaching
without words,
performing
without actions:

that
is the Sage's way.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

The three treasures of the Tao

Let's reexamine the Tao's three treasures of compassion, simplicity and patience from the perspective of NON-action. Sometimes those in the thrall of yang really do have a...

compassionate intention and towards it's end they tend to move in either an impulsive or contrived manner. Yin too is motivated by compassion but instead of relying upon scatteredness or contrivance it...

makes use of simplicity's centered spontaneity. This method requires that a sage act with the same patience with which a...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

*tree metaphorically displays when
disrupting the concrete contrivances of
city planners long gone.*

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Tao Te Ching
chapter Forty-four

(44: 1)

Fame or integrity:
which is more important?

(44: 2)

Money or happiness:
which is more valuable?

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Importance and Value

This forty-fourth chapter is an amazing chapter that stands out from the ocean of other amazing chapters in the Tao Te Ching. We begin with some uncomfortable choices, the “Sophie’s Choice” of...

choices. First we’re asked to choose which is more important fame or integrity. The use of the adjective “important” reminds us that fame isn’t about real importance, as much as it is about...

others perceived importance of us. A perception that is often as irrational as it is temporary. My inner adolescent screams “I reject the premise of this question” for I want both fame AND integrity. But all...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

pseudo-intellectual petulance aside, of the two, which is more important to long term happiness as well as creative productivity? Clearly integrity! Then we're asked to choose which is more...

valuable money or happiness. Again the selection of the adjective, this time valuable, infers that if money is important it is because it is valuable, but the question infers that not only is money no guarantee of...

happiness but occasionally an impediment to it. Likewise money without happiness often leads to self destruction. These questions voiced in the first two sentences of this chapter serve to...

reveal and undermine our superficial assumptions that fame is important and that money is valuable as well as the deeper assumptions that integrity leads to fame and that money leads to happiness. But what if these...

four assumptions were incorrect? What if the next three sentences reevaluated many pillars of our self-destructively patriarchal society?

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(44: 3)

Success or failure:
which is more destructive?

(44: 4)

If you look to others
for fulfillment,
you will never
truly be fulfilled.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(44: 5)

If your happiness
depends on money,
you will never
be happy with yourself.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Success, relationships and money

Our ego-driven society teaches that success, relationships and money are not only the keys to safety, happiness and fulfillment, but that they're what life is all about, and that they're acquisition is...

what makes us a winner, and that failing to achieve them makes us losers. And yet this chapter infers that success could be destructive, relationships do NOT necessarily lead to fulfillment and money could undermine our...

ability to be happy with ourselves. What does the remainder of this chapter have to say about new or better ways of appeasing our primal drives for wealth and happiness?

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(44: 6)

Be content
with what you have;
rejoice
in the way things are.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(44: 7)

When you realize
there is nothing lacking,
the whole world
belongs to you.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Contentment, joy and realization

Rather than lauding success, relationships and money, this chapter of the Tao Te Ching encourages us to make contentment, joy and realization our goals. It promises that if we do, the whole world will...

belong to us. Is that to be taken literally? Given the poetic nature of Lao Tzu's treatise, it's most likely figurative, but as metaphors go, it is in harmony with the superficiality of yang's goals and...

sure does function to communicate a positive outcome to we who have been shaped by our superficial society. But how do we get to contentment, joy and realization from here. If we persist in our yang momentum our journey could...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

be characterized as either scattered, jumping from one random action to the other shouting affirmations until we loose our voice, (like some famous self-help gurus) and filling the walls of our domicile with...

one vision board after another. If our yang journey is contrived, we could set goals and move heaven and earth to make it happen. But in the larger context of the Tao Te Ching it is inferred that...

if the path is the goal, and we cultivate patience, compassion and simplicity's centered spontaneity through the vulnerable and non-conceptual practice of...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

awareness and acquiescence contentment, joy and realization could take care of themselves. Perhaps that is why in the fourth sentence of the nineteenth chapter we read:

“...just stay at the center of the circle and let all things take their course.”

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Tao Te Ching
chapter Forty-five

(45: 1)

True perfection
seems imperfect,
yet it is perfectly
itself.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(45: 2)

True fullness
seems empty,
yet it is fully **present**.

(45: 3)

True straightness
seems crooked.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(45: 4)

True wisdom
seems foolish.

(45: 5)

True art
seems artless.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Seems

What is the common denominator between the first through fifth sentences? Seems.

Seems, seems, seems, seems, seems, to be more precise. The greatest accomplishments, in all of the...

areas that feel so important, and perhaps are so important, can seem to our emotions, intentions, reason, recall and imagination to be abysmal failures, which is the opposite of what they are. This mistaken perception is...

NOT uncommon, and may very well be why we are utterly unqualified to be in control of these things, or anything really. Perhaps this is why, in the third and...

fourth sentences of the seventy-fourth chapter of the Tao Te Ching we read:

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

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

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(45: 6)

The Sage
allows things to happen.

(45: 7)

She shapes events
as they come.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(45: 8)

She steps out of the way
and let's the Tao
speak for itself.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Mastery's path

In the sixth sentence we read “The Sage allows things to happen.” We read of her act of yielding and thus allowing the flow state of the Tao to do its work. Superficially the seventh sentence seems to contradict this acquiescence by...

stating that “She shapes events as they come.” Wow, that sounds pretty active. That doesn't sound yielding at all. It looks like the sixth sentence turns one way, the seventh sentence turns the other and then the eighth sentence...

turns back again as it reads “She steps out of the way and lets the Tao speak for itself.” This erratic, stutter stepping illustrated here does an excellent job of describing the journey from novice to master. Yes, the sage of the tao has so mastered the...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

vulnerability, non-conceptuality, awareness and acquiescence of simplicity's centered spontaneity that she is able to practice them spontaneously, habitually, easily and effectively. But that wasn't always the case. She began, as...

we all do, unconsciously ignorant of her yang oriented habits of scatteredness, contrivance as well as control, no less their negative consequences; and utterly ignorant that the path of yin was even an option, no less an advantage. She entered into...

conscious confusion's second phase of her journey when she became aware either from a person, a text, or intuition that she was mired in toxic yang but yearned for the freedom of yin. The third phase began when she not only received the...

teachings and techniques necessary to practice yin, but master it as well. However she did not step over the threshold of the fourth and final phase of unconscious mastery until she had oft performed the third phase's process of...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

cycling between intending to yield to the Tao's flow state, slipping back into her habit energies of scatteredness, contrivance, and control, snapping out of it, and then actively choosing to yield to centered spontaneity yet...

again. The path of mastery is paved with resolve, error, realization, and a return to yielding over and over and over again. Perhaps that is why it is said that repetition is the mother of skill. In time we could firmly...

root ourselves in the here and now, like a catcher squatting behind the batter, in a baseball game. We could shape things, beings, circumstance and phenomena as...

they come to us BY habitually stepping out of the way and allowing the Tao to speak for itself.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Tao Te Ching
*chapter **Forty-six***

(46: 1)

When a country
is in **harmony**
with the Tao,

the factories
make trucks and tractors.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(46: 2)

When a country
goes **counter**
to the Tao,

warheads are stockpiled
outside the cities.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(46: 3)

There is **NO** greater illusion
than **fear**,
NO greater wrong than
preparing to **defend** yourself...

NO greater misfortune
than having an **enemy**.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(46: 4)

**Whoever can see
through all fear
will always be safe.**

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

The price of disharmony

In the first sentence of this chapter we read of the inert and utterly harmless fruits of living in harmony with the flow state of the Tao. In the...

second sentence, by way of contrast, we are shown the toxic and destructive results of living in resistance to the Tao. It is a mistake to think of this as a punishment handed down from...

a petty deity, but rather the natural consequence of traversing yang's path of scatteredness and contrivance. Patriarchy has many tools with which to manipulate others. Those most frequently used are...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

withdrawn from the shed of fear. The dangers of the fear lifestyle are enumerated in the third sentence where illusion, wrongness and misfortune are correlated with fear, defensiveness, and perceiving one has enemies. Like the...

first domino in a line of dominos, that when toppled in the appropriate direction causes a chain reaction amongst its fellows, fear is depicted at the first domino in our chain reaction of misfortune. Almost sadistically, in...

the fourth sentence, we read that our safety is dependent upon our transcendence of fear. How could this be sadistic? Because it's the last sentence of the chapter and it contains no overt directions on how to...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

“...see through all fear...”. Yes, this chapter really would be sadistic, if its first sentence did not infer the solution to the dilemma of fear; harmonizing with the Tao. By way of reminder we kick open the dungeon of yang’s patriarchy and...

frolic in the glorious, springtime meadow of yin’s matriarchy (like Julie Andrews in the first reel of “The Sound of Music”) by cultivating centered spontaneity through the vulnerable and...

non-conceptual practice of awareness and acquiescence.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Tao Te Ching
chapter Forty-seven

(47: 1)

Without opening your door,
you can open your heart
to the world.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

How society has metaphorically painted itself into a corner

We can love the world without traveling the world. Why could our love for all be effortless and uncontrived? Because it is a natural feature of our healthy neural architecture. Why is this universal compassion harder from some? Varying...

degrees of sociopathy. Psychopaths are individuals who suffer the grave misfortune of having been born without their brain's empathy center, or an ability to meaningfully access it, not dissimilar to...

being born without a brain, or a limb. Just as some are missing a limb due to a birth defect and others as the result of a circumstance such as an accident or an attack, where psychopaths are born, sociopaths are...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

made or conditioned. It has been observed that since the advent of the Neolithic revolution society has functionally punished empathy and generosity as well as rewarded greed, competition and various degrees of...

cruelty both individually and institutionally. We could let go of society's destructive conditioning and lovingly flow with the Tao.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(47: 2)

Without looking
out your window,
you can see the essence
of the Tao.

(47: 3)

The more you **know**,
the less you understand.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(47: 4)

The Sage arrives
without leaving,
sees the light
without looking...

achieves
without doing a thing.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Doing without effort

This chapter returns to the common theme of acting in neither a scattered nor a contrived and scheming manner, but rather from a place of non-conceptual, vulnerable, centered spontaneity that...

flows from awareness and acquiescence. This uncontrived acting is poetically referred to as doing without doing. In the first and second sentence of this chapter we read that without exerting the...

physical effort of opening a door, or looking out a window our heart and mind could spontaneously and spiritually open and see. In anticipation of our resistance to the idea of swapping our yang world view for yin's the...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

third sentence reminds us that the more our mind is imprisoned behind the walls of rigidity's preconceptions, the less it can meaningfully perceive. In the fourth and...

final sentence of this chapter Lao Tzu then reassures us of yin's efficacy by explaining that the sage of the Tao could accomplish: arrival, perception and achievement with OUT leaving, looking, or doing. What a compelling metaphor for entering and abiding in the flow state.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Tao Te Ching
chapter Forty-eight

(48: 1)

In the pursuit of knowledge,
every day
something is added.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(48: 2)

In the practice of the Tao,
every day
something is dropped.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Drop much?

What could we be dropping? Assumptions, preconceptions, beliefs, certitudes, desires, dreads, expectations, platitudes, contrivances, and manipulations. What is the mysterious...

mechanism, the occult secret hand shake, that facilitates this transformation? Noticing, and Relaxing provide the centering that is the basis of beneficial spontaneity.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(48: 3)

Less and less
do you need to force things,
until finally
you arrive at **NON**-action.

(48: 4)

When nothing is done,
nothing is left undone.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Best way

Noticing and relaxing set the stage for centered spontaneity and pave the way for the mastery of non-action. It's safe to forget the myth of "making things happen." The most effective way to...

receive our goals (or something even better) is to master centered spontaneity.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(48: 5)

True mastery
can be gained
by letting things go
their own way.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

(48: 6)

**It can NOT be gained
by interfering.**

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Metaphoric Myopia

Upon our journey we often come to a point, that seems very much like a fork in the road, where it appears that we are being asked (as if challenged) by the universe “Which do you most value, this petty goal, or...

Mastery of the path?” The delicious irony is that by choosing the latter we invariably receive the fringe benefit of the former, or something much better, but that we couldn't... see in the myopia of our limited view of reality.

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

Mastery

I witnessed no lack of Tae Kwon Do studios in the three decades I lived in California's San Diego county. All have instructors, many have masters, and some have grand masters. Both in martial arts, as well as traditional meditation, titles can hold the...

allure of credibility. Like if one's teacher's rank was sufficiently high then one would could easily and rapidly perform the martial art exploits reserved for silly, unrealistic, fantasy based, action movies. Sadly, in the quest for the perfect teacher, and...

his studio, few ask their would be instructors how they knew their techniques could be rapidly mastered by aging soccer moms who only wanted to survive the specter of roving thugs promised to them by conservative infotainment masquerading as...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

cable news, while simultaneously recapturing the swimsuit body, they never had, but which magazines had insisted were their birthrights. As inferred by Trungpa's book "Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism," it is not uncommon for yang, or ego to...

bring its scatteredness, contrivance, coercion and controlling tendencies into the spiritual path. While the Spanish Inquisition's Tomas de Torquemada may be an outward example, complete with cinema worthy grotesquery, inward...

piously cranky bastards roam the corridors of each of our hearts. One of the ways our inner Torquemada rears its head is in its lust for rank, title or achievement. The authoritarianism of patriarchy delights in evaluating others, assigning them condemnation, accolades and...

lofty-sounding titles. However, it doesn't take long, upon the contemplative path, to realize that the presence or absence of a title is no guarantee of accomplishment or expertise. Not the superficial expertise, that has...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

mastered tradition's meaningless minutia, that can make a hapless student into twice the cranky and unaccomplished minion of orthodoxy that their well titled teachers are; but the real mastery of yin's path of simplicity, patience and compassion. This chapter is...

written with those who aspire to true spiritual mastery in mind. The first two sentences in this chapter concern themselves with learning. Inferring that upon the path of patriarchy's path of learning we strive to add information to the computer banks of...

our minds, often reinforcing the cognitive bias of our own preconceptions. By way of contrast we are taught that on matriarchy's path, the journey toward real mastery is paved with the scraping off and release of assumption, dogma and certitude. As...

with all things yin, the path of the Tao seems to be characterized by release and acquiescence. This overall characteristic is explored in the third and fourth sentences, where it is inferred that only by abandoning yang's scatteredness, contrivance, coercion, fear as...

Commentary – of Volume 8 (chapters 43 - 48)

well as anger, and relying upon yin's centered spontaneity, can we hope to complete the path, no less truly be of great service to many others. This chapter wraps it up in a nice, pretty bow in the fifth and sixth sentences by...

explaining that acquiescence is not just a good way to true mastery of the Tao, it is the only way.