

The Tao of Parenting:
Parenting Through
The Tao te Ching

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*To Stephanie, Kevin, Alexis, Kent & Riley –
You are my greatest teachers.*

The following interpretation of the Tao, modified for the topic of parenting was derived from several translations of the Tao te Ching.

1

When you don't have an agenda, when you are not looking for what you want to create, you are open to what wants to come. From the same "Darkness" come all things if we are willing to sit in the dark and wait for understanding.

Darkness is "Source" to me. If our lives play out on a stage, Darkness is the ever-present "no-thing-ness" or backdrop to the stage our lives play out upon. "The curtain" (in this scenario) would be our awareness.

When we parent, we have the opportunity to peer out from behind the curtain and view what is "playing out" on the stage of our lives. Yet, often, we are so center-stage of our lives, that little time is spent behind the curtain. As we begin to view these "characters" (known as our children) that we have perfectly cast in our lives (and they, us), we can ask ourselves, "What is the role I have cast them in?" and "What is the role their soul wishes to play?" And, "Does the role I am currently playing facilitate this?"

As the "drama coach" in their lives, I have the opportunity to help them learn, grow and it is a continual balance of helping them with their lines while also allowing them to tap into their innate talent and allowing them to "shine" in their own ways. As a parent, I can become aware of my own "drama" as it is playing out and be certain I am not entangling my "story" with my child's.

When issues arise, I can stop, take a deep breath and become the “awareness” to what is happening – the “as-it-is-ness” and ask, “What is this about?” Who (me or my child) should be taking responsibility for the “lines” and how can I support and coach my child so that they learn how to respond to similar situations that arise in their lives without my continual prompting?

When in “Dark”, remember, it is the birthing place of all things. The light within will be lit when we open the curtain (our awareness) to what is happening. “Free from desire” – as in, we allow what is happening to happen without resistance.

When we do this, the lights go on, the stage is lit up and the “stars” of the show shine in their own light, own awareness and can live out their own stories to thunderous applause.

Curtain call anyone?

2

When we choose sides we separate from one another and we can separate from parts of ourselves. If something is labeled “beautiful” then there is something that we can label as “ugly”. When we have an expectation of what is “good”, then we have immediately created something that is “bad”.

These are all constructs we create within our own selves. Everything just “is”. When we label something our child has done (behavior) as good or bad, we have not created a situation from which they can learn. We have boxed them and ourselves into a no-win situation. We all get to know ourselves through our extremes, which is in turn how we find balance. Children are no different. They bump around trying to find out “what works” and what doesn’t work. We forget that this is what life is all about. Behavior (“good and bad”) is a language. It “speaks” as to how the child is assimilating and relating to their world. When we label it, we take the learning out of it.

As masters in parenting (and we all are!), we can act without doing. This does not mean that we sit passively by as things fall part (or seem to in our every-racing minds). All actions arise from a state of consciousness that is grounded, connected and fully present. It is like an archer right before they release the bow. They see only one thing and that is the target. Clear. Present. Alert. Aware. A master parent, “teaches without saying anything” – our very presence – our “being-ness” is the teacher. “Things

come and go and she allows it” – this is the essence of being at peace with what is happening.

While in Ohio, my daughter was stung by a bee. I heard her cries from inside and it was as if nothing existed in my world, as I “honed” in on her. I flew like lightening to her, whisked her up and had iced it and applied baking soda within seconds. It was this single-focused, linear-laser like action that arose from a clear, calm state, yet ignited what needed to be done. What was “to do” was not even a question. It happened through me.

What does this look like at bedtime with a child that refuses to sleep? Linear-laser: We get very clear about what is important. “Does my child really need to do this?” In this case, yes. We tell our child that although we cannot “make” them sleep, we will provide the opportunity to do so. We then give them a choice of “lying here quietly and sleeping” or “lying here quietly.” There is no struggle, no “good or bad”, only opportunities to learn how to be in this world, assimilate information, and experiences and grow. In the end, we do not “make” anyone do anything. We simply offer opportunities to learn and experience and hold a space that is clear, aware, unshakeable and unconditionally loving.

We stop labeling and we begin loving.

3

“Practice not doing and everything will work out.”

“Not doing” is an uncommon practice in Western society and in particular a foreign concept in parenting. The list of “to do’s” as a parent is endless. I’m sure the concept of “not doing” might have brought up (if only slight) a bit of angst for you.

This is not the same as doing nothing. Allow me to explain what I have come to settle into as “not doing”. Admittedly, most of my early parenting days consisted of continual doing and reacting to something in this moment with a temporary fix. I was on continual high alert and ready to go to battle, as necessary.

It often felt as though a lump of stress stayed poised for unleashing just beneath the surface and would bubble up and over. What I was doing began to overtake who I was trying to BE. The calm, peaceful Zen-like master, who had been one with the Universe during meditation mere hours before was barking out orders in a shrill-voice and usually over socks on the floor or dishes left in the sink!

“Not doing” is the birthing place for doing. It is the stance we assume, the breath we take in, and the awareness we step into that allows for clear, right action. It looks like pausing when you observe the socks (for the 100th time) all over the floor, before responding. It allows for clear, concise direction.

Not that moments do not arise that require “high alert”. I have had to leap a few chairs to unleash a choke-able

from a toddler's hand before ingestion. But, we hit the pause button for a moment so that when we do "act" it is from the place inside ourselves that already knows what needs to be done and allows us to do it without all of the veins popping out of our necks!

4

The Tao is empty and deep; when used it is never used up.

I don't know about you, but often as a parent, I have felt "used up". There are moments, days and even weeks when there seems to be more "to do's" than I have the time or energy for. Walking through autism with my son, with therapies, most of which I did myself, was rigorous. There were days I fell into bed fully clothed wondering if I could do this one more day. Growing into a greater awareness of connectedness and "being", I recognized how a lot of my efforts were focused on doing things, but also on trying to maintain some sort of control and balance in my life. It seemed I was spending a lot of energy struggling with and against my life.

As I started to settle into the concept of living the Tao, I recognized that when I am centered and breathing deeply into my Divine Self and Connectedness, there was an endless well that was "never used up". What it looked like was stopping. I stopped fighting with messy rooms (although a "pick up the floor, so I can vacuum up lifeforms off the floor once a week" was still a good idea), furniture that showed "kid ware", unmade beds (gasp!), kids who wouldn't eat their broccoli (despite all my best efforts to make it attractive!), and letting go of my agenda for what wanted to happen. As I would breathe into each moment as it arose, I realized there was always enough – for that moment. However, if I was caught in my head

about what HAD happened, or what would happen in the future, the energy (that was fully available for THIS moment) was scattered and my well would run dry.

Stopping to take a breath and say, “Where am I?” and bring ourselves back to the present moment connects us to the endless supply in the “well”. In this state, we find the reality of “in doing nothing, everything is done.” We just have to be willing to let go of everything else. The biggest “everything else” is our own expectations. We let go of expectations of what should be, expectations of ourselves and expectations of our children. If we can let go and let what wants to happen – happen, not only does our “cup runneth over”, a great sense of peace and harmony bubbles over as well.

5

The Tao stays in the middle between the “good” and the “bad” giving birth to both... The more it is used, the more there is, the more you speak of it, the less you fully understand. Hold on to the center.

Balance. The Tao speaks of “the middle way”, the place in the center that resides between good and bad. As we parent, we strive to find this middle way. As we stay grounded and centered, we stop “taking sides” or even finding the need to call anything good or bad. We hold onto the center, which resides deep within us and is unshakeable.

The beauty of the Tao is that the more you “tap into it” – the more that it becomes available to us. How do we do this? We start by sitting each moment, before the day erupts, in a few moments of quiet to find the center of our Being. This is the place from which all else flows. As we connect to this each day, we can remind ourselves in the middle of chaos of “the order” we have within, simply by dropping into our breath and connecting to the ever-present, ever-flowing Tao energy. It is so easy to get caught up in every day activities and the whirl of the day consumes us and we are vacillating from one extreme to the other. Our children bump around, getting to know themselves, their limits and how life pushes back. They go from one end (we might label this “bad” if we did not step back and see it for what it is) to the other (perhaps calling it “good” as it fits in with our expectations). Yet, in the

center, we see that both are necessary for our child to find out who they are, where the boundaries lie and how to find their own balance. “The more we talk, the less we understand.” So, as we quiet our mind, we can listen, both with our ears and eyes but mostly with the calm centered “being-ness” of who we are to what our child is actually saying and doing.

Behavior is a language and when we are centered we begin looking for clues as to what our child is saying and communicating. We talk less, and understand more. We stop labeling and begin to look to really see, “What is my child trying to tell me or show me with this behavior?” In this we find our center and connect more deeply with our child.

When we connect and open our heart chakra, we can look clearly to the intention of our child’s behavior. What need were they trying to have met? What were they trying to accomplish? When we are able to connect with this, their “missed” behavior makes more sense and we are able to redirect them toward a behavior that hits their mark. Everyone wins. The child gets their need/s met, and we get to have behavior that is more in alignment with what we find acceptable.

6

The Tao is The Great Mother: empty yet you cannot use it up; inexhaustible, it supports endless possibilities. It is always within you. You can use it any way you want.

I love the reference of the Tao, the life force within us as The Great Mother. Mother is the nurturer, giver, unconditionally loving presence that “feeds” and bathes us in Her warmth. When truly connected to this Presence, we are “empty” (as in nothing impedes the flow of the Divine) yet, inexhaustible, which is different than not ever being tired! There is an ever-present level of energy that flows through us - doing the doing.

The “trick” in life, and in parenting is 1) finding this Presence and 2) staying connected to it. In parenting, what this has looked like for me, is suspending the whirling thoughts (what groceries do I need to get, what bills need to be paid, oh, and where is the permission slip I need to sign and get back for my child’s field trip...on and on...) while being in the presence of my child/children. When I see my daughter, do I light up and does SHE see this? Or does it look and sound like, “You need to get ready for school, brush your teeth, did you do your homework, where’s your backpack?...on and on...” It is so easy to get caught up in trying to make them better people, that we forget that they are already inherently perfect. The Tao seeks to flow through us to our children, but we can often impede it with the “doing”.

Imagine you meet your best friend for coffee. Time is precious, so this is merely a once a month date. When you see her for the first time in a month, you begin to tell her ways of improving herself, or comment on all of the things that are “wrong” with her. No, our impulse is to run up, hug her and tell her how wonderful it is to see her, ask her how she is doing and find out what is going on in her life.

What would it look (and feel) like if each time we saw our child (be it first thing in the morning, right after school, etc.) that we “lit” up and our child saw that we “really saw” them and that more than anything we were just happy to BE with them? If our “mirror” reflecting back to them showed them how beautiful, wonderful and completely adored they were...I wonder what that would do to *their* being-ness.

Seems like all the “doing” stuff would pale in comparison to that!

7

The Master is always behind the scenes and that is why she is “ahead”. She remains one with all things, because she is non-attached. She has released the part of her that is “not real” and remembers her Oneness with all things. Thus, she is always full.

The Master stays “behind.” She stays in the calm, serene space behind the curtain, behind all that is happening, observing, and finding clarity and her center. She gets “ahead”, not by racing herself into oblivion, but by staying behind what is happening and allowing what is happening to play out in front of her without being attached to it. “She is detached from all things”. She is not invested in an outcome – only what is happening in the moment and her contribution to it. Is she adding to the problem or taking away from it?

In the middle of a melt-down, staying behind looks like dropping to your knees, breathing deeply, slowly and connecting with the “reptilian” brain-state your child is in. This is a brain-state that is very rudimentary and will not respond well to talking. As you ensure their safety, you are not attached to what happens (who is looking at you making judgments, whether or not the child can be “talked out” of their feelings in the moment), you are merely present, calm, serene, and “behind” it all. Sometimes talking softly, sometimes you are just “being” with the child, allowing them to have their feelings. Perhaps you hold them, if that is helpful, perhaps you stay lovingly

“unattached” (which is different than detaching – which feels like withdrawing love).

When the storm passes, in that same unflustered presence, the child is welcomed home to their state of balance with warm, loving arms and you become “one with them” because you never got caught in the cross-winds of the storm – you remained in the “I” of the storm. Too often, we are so focused on a result, that we forget to be fully present in the process of what is happening. What is happening is where the lesson is and where the blessing is, if we are willing to “stay behind”, be unattached, let go of our lower selves, we truly will be always and forever perfectly fulfilled.

It begins with the connection to our Higher Source and continues when we maintain that connection – even in the middle of a storm!

8

The Tao is like water, which washes over everything, nourishing and releasing. Think simply, be fair, and giving, without controlling. Do what you love and live completely in the “now”. When you love the essence of who you are without comparison or competition, you gain the respect of everyone.

In parenting, our “supreme good” arises from the stillness within and flows through us like water, nourishing all things without trying at all. It is because we are in alignment with our True Selves, so our being-ness is whole and complete. Our mere presence provides a place of comfort, safety and love. Our thoughts are “simple” in that we stay out of our heads. We recognize the thoughts that arise, but we operate from our heart-space, we allow love to do the thinking and dictating of action in our lives.

There is no need to control, because we see the divine perfection in all beings and things – even when it appears as if all is in total chaos. We trust the process of reorganization (much like that of clearing out a cluttered closet – a lot of stuff has to come out, some of it tossed in the process before we can put things back in – in an orderly fashion). We recognize our attempts to control our children, their behavior and who they “be” comes from a deep level of fear. Releasing this fear allows us to “flow like water” in love.

We become completely present, aware of what is going on with no judgments of comparison on how we are doing

because our focus has shifted from “doing” to being. We are watching, observing, and loving from a place that sees beyond our sensory perception. We “see” with x-ray vision of love.

What does this “look” like? It looks like seeing the child behind the messy room. In finding their loveableness, we find our own. We reconcile with our own selves our own worthiness just because we are alive and we are able to give this away to our children. We can still expect them to clean their rooms, and offer to help them if they are overwhelmed, but the underlying message is always one of complete and total unconditional love. The message is what you do is less important than who you are. When we teach wholeness (by modeling it ourselves) what our children learn is that right action flows from right alignment with the truth of who we all are – Divine Beings-whole and perfect!

I do not imagine that water worries where it will go. It isn't in the flow; it IS the flow. Learning this simple act of surrender in parenting allows us to flow with life. Life is going to “take us” there anyway. The question is, what state would we prefer to arrive there in – one of frustration, anxiety and fear, or one of complete peace, joy and love?

9

Hold your cup under water and it will eventually spill over. If you sharpen your knife too much, it will become dull. If you run after money, you will never obtain enough. When you care what other's think, you become a prisoner to them. Do your work, then let it go – this is the Tao – the path to peace.

Often, we try to cram a lot into a day, and into the lives of our children. Most of this stems from a desire to enrich their lives with experiences and opportunities, perhaps ones we ourselves never had. But it can be too much and things start to spill over. How much is enough? How much time do we spend (and teach our children to do the same) chasing after things? Do we end up having meals in the car between shuffling from soccer, to gymnastics, to piano lessons to more of the same for our other children? Are we measuring ourselves against others and caring what they might think or if we are doing enough for our children?

Over the years, having had 5 children in my house, I have found that life gets lived in the simple moments. What children remember are not the lessons and organized activities. Although some have a passion for a particular thing and run with it, in general, all of these “filling of the bowl” activities we put into our children tend to just spill out.

The simple, yet memorable moments arise when there is time to just be. when a silly song gets sung, spontaneously or a game gets played, or fun erupts – for no

reason at all. Our children are not asking for more “to do” when they say they are bored. They want a connection and stimulation – something that speaks to their being-ness. When we continuously give our children something to do, they have very little time to wiggle around with becoming. Becoming comes from no-thing. There has to be a place for it to be birthed and that doesn’t happen in the midst of a flurry of activities.

When we “do our work” and then are able to step back from it because there is very little doing. We do what makes sense and arises in the moment but from a conscious place. In stopping for just a moment to evaluate what we are doing we can begin to decipher how much of it is just our avoidance with being fully present, in the absence of distraction with our children.

10

Can you truly love people without having an agenda? Can you allow life to take its course in even the most important things? Can you be like a little baby and not cling to anything? Can you nurture and hold without possessing, can you do without clinging to results, can you lead without controlling? This is the Tao. Allowing.

Parenting is a course in letting go. In the beginning, our children come to us (“we have them but do not possess them”) helpless, and we need to care for their every need or they will not survive. As they grow into independence we relinquish this control, little by little so that they are able to live their own lives. It becomes difficult at times to lead them without imposing our will. We get very good at making sure they are o.k. and when they begin to make decisions that are outside our definition of “o.k.”, it gets scary. Letting the most vital matters evolve and simply take their course becomes a scary and risky proposition for us. This doesn’t mean that we do not intervene when necessary or guide and provide healthy boundaries. It just means we stop imposing our will all of the time, lead by example and recognize as our children grow and change, that they are going to have to make decisions that won’t always seem to work out. But they do. As they are all lessons designed to grow our souls.

As we give birth and nourish, hold on without holding back and give love, understanding and compassion without expectations, we relinquish control. Not because we

couldn't figure this all out for our children and ensure that they "get it right". It is because we *have* figured it out that we relinquish control recognizing this is our child's time to learn. We simply step back from our own minds and understand all things – all things are well, Divinely designed and from a centered place "act" without doing, as the right and perfect answer always comes forth.

This often just looks like waiting a few extra moments for them to figure it out or waiting for their response. When we slow down and recognize that our child is in the process of learning, we begin to allow more time for this to take place.

