

“One Minute Less”
Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley
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Geneva B. Politzer© Worship Associate;
John Kallmann, Worship Associate

Readings:

“Living by Decreasing” (Verse 48, *Tao te Ching*, a modern interpretation)
by Wayne W. Dyer

Learning consists of daily accumulating.
The practice of the Tao consists of daily diminishing;
decreasing and decreasing, until doing nothing.
When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.
True mastery can be gained
by letting things go their own way.
It cannot be gained by interfering.
[from *Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Life*, c. 2007]

“No Regrets”
by Geneva B. Politzer

People will tell you,
Don't waste time on regret.
For that matter, don't waste time. Period.
We have so little, and then, it's gone.

But a small voice within argues,
embrace it all—whole days wasted
wallowing in regret, or fantasizing
about an impossible future.

Embrace every bypassed opportunity
to improve the human condition;
each shortcoming, unkindness, or judgment;
every flimsy excuse.

The Tao says, it's all part of Being,
a circle dance that comes 'round,
comes 'round, comes 'round right
if we just let go, let go, let go.

By conceding the worst I can be,
I learn to become better.
There is no time lost—
only time walking me toward eternity.

'Tis the season! The packages have all been opened--surprisingly fast considering how long it took to shop for them, or even make them. The furious flurry of holiday parties is behind us, likely along with a few unwanted pounds. The joyful anticipation with which we dug the seasonal trimmings out of our attics, basements, and sheds is all but forgotten as we face packing it all away again for another year.

Another year. Where did it go?

'Tis the season.

At this time of year, many of us pause to reflect on the year we've just lived. We take stock, and look ahead to a new year. Perhaps we regret missed opportunities, unnurtured friendships, difficult family tensions. Perhaps we believe that what we need is this fresh slate upon which we might begin charting a new course.

Perhaps we might begin by making New Year's resolutions. We *will* sort through that pile in the junk room; we *will* get out and walk every day; we *will* catch up on correspondence; we *will* be more patient, more supportive, more present.

But somehow, despite our enthusiasm to begin again, we know at some level that this, too, shall pass. Like facing our driveways after a new snowfall, we've gone from admiring the still-life of nature's absolute beauty to the chore of shoveling out. Now that pristine snow is full of ice, gravel, and dirt. It's heavy on the shovel and heavier on the heart. Where did that sense of utter amazement go?

'Tis the season.

How might we begin again, but this time, more effectively? How might we transform our lives without spending years studying complex spiritual practices?

I'd like to propose a radically different set of New Year's resolutions for 2010. In fact, it's not even a set. It's only one resolution, remarkably simple. One everyone can do regardless of age, health, or life situation. Resolve to do less.

Some 2,500 years ago, a Chinese prophet named Lao-Tzu became dismayed with the continual decay of warring states. According to legend, he rode out into the desert to escape the chaos. There he met a gatekeeper who asked the prophet to record the essence of his teachings. The result was the Tao Te Ching, a group of 81 simple verses known as "The Way." These have been translated and interpreted more than any other writing except the Bible.

What's so attractive about this philosophy? Its transcendent timelessness and simplicity seem to fit a limitless variety of cultures. It speaks to humankind on many levels. I find that it speaks to me as no other philosophy or spiritual practice has.

Wayne Dyer, popular author of dozens of books and tapes on spiritual practices, wrote his own interpretation of the Tao in *Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Life*. The Tao, he says, is "the supreme reality, an all-pervasive Source of everything. The Tao never begins or ends, does nothing, and yet animates everything in the world . . . If you think that being forceful is appropriate, Lao Tzu urges you to see the value in being humble. If action seems called for, he asks you to consider nonaction." [Dyer, Wayne W., xii, *Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Life*, c. 2007]

Nonaction is what I'd like to consider today. In Dyer's words, from Verse 48, living by decreasing. [Dyer *ibid.*, 235]

In an impossibly complex and frenetic world, it's not easy to consider nonaction, much less incorporate it as a spiritual practice. And yet, it seems that the more we're willing to let go, the easier our lives become.

This practice is what Dyer calls "doing the Tao now." It's a radically different approach to life. Rather than strive to learn more, do more, achieve more, the Tao reminds us that there is no way to happiness; rather, happiness is the way. By letting go of expectations, or the material trappings of abundance, instead concentrating on feeling gratitude for the natural abundance in our lives, we can reconnect to that deeper source within us all. Some call it God. I call it Tao.

My life tends to be anything but simple and peaceful. I live in what amounts to a modified emergency room, with a teen-ager who has lived on death's doorstep 16 years. People often ask me how I *ever* manage to achieve a sense of calm, much less fulfillment. Through a process of trial and error, I've worked out a spiritual practice that helps hold chaos at bay. That practice embraces

Taoism. Living by decreasing.

The Tao has become a trusted friend, mentor, and guardian angel. I can open it to any page, any time, and find just what I need to avert a crisis, find a place of peace, release expectations, and renew my sense of gratitude for the natural abundance in my life.

I'm particularly fond of Ron Hogan's 2004 American vernacular version of the Tao, which really cuts to the chase. "Stop doing stuff all the time, and watch what happens."

["The Tao Te Ching, a modern interpretation of Lao Tzu" by Ron Hogan, <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd-nc/1.0/>]

It's not so easy for anyone, much less a teen-ager in this culture, to walk away from the lure of stuff. In fact, it seems that kids are becoming materially oriented at younger ages all the time. Many of us struggle to impart less materialistic values to our children. And yet, if we don't succeed, they will face untold stress. We need to model this simple principle to them daily. "Stop doing stuff all the time, and watch what happens."

The Parents' Tao, by William Martin, interprets Verse 48 in a way that really speaks to me, especially as a parent. But it also applies well in all our relationships with one another:

Your children do not need more.
Each day adds more facts,
more gadgets,
more activities,
more desires,
and more confusion to their lives.

Your task is to subtract.
Each day seek to remove,
to clarify, to simplify.
Society's wisdom adds, and confusion grows.
The wisdom of the Tao subtracts, and serenity flourishes.

If each day one minute less was spent doing something,
and one minute more was spent being present,
in simple pleasures with your children,

in two months you would transform your life.

And theirs.

One minute less.

[Martin, William, *The Parent's Tao Te Ching: Ancient Advice for Modern Parents*, Marlowe & Co., c. 1999]

Just think of it. What could be easier than simply decreasing our stress levels for one minute? Instead of trying to cram in one more activity, one more obligation, one more promise to do something, be somewhere, why not stop, lay down that cell phone, daily planner, pen, or book, and simply breathe? Fix yourself a cup of tea and sit in silence for a minute. Look out at the snow and say "thank you." One minute.

Let's try that right now. Close your eyes. Breathe deeply. Be aware of your heart beating, your muscles relaxing. Calm your mind. Imagine taking an eraser and wiping away whatever thought pops into your head. Inhale. Exhale. Open your eyes. Touch the hand of the person sitting next to you. Smile.

Now, doesn't that feel better?

Dyer suggests that rather than validating yourself by acquiring more, doing more, "you can reverse this embedded idea of increasing as the criteria for mastering life. The benefit of living by decreasing is seeing your world in a different light--one in which you'll experience a greater sense of completeness." [Dyer, *ibid.*, 235] The Tao suggests that stuff is a burden that imprisons us.

Stop doing--or getting--stuff all the time, and see what happens.

Think of it this way--everything we own creates an obligation. Everything we do creates an expectation. Obligations and expectations increase stress in our lives. And we all know that's one thing we all can benefit from decreasing.

You might begin by decreasing your need to buy things. Instead, take pleasure in everything that already exists in your life.

During the children's moment, we talked about giving away something we don't really need. Dyer puts this to practice by suggesting that we let go of five items we own, right now, putting them into circulation so that others might find them. By placing value not on stuff but on our loved ones,

and on our own peace of mind, we increase that peace of mind--ours and theirs.

Just let go. It isn't as hard as you think.

Resolve to do less. Resolutions are tricky. Once we've made them, albeit with the best of intentions, they actually become obligations that place us under additional stress. If they are important enough; if they increase our happiness and sense of inner fulfillment, we will practice them without having to browbeat ourselves.

Resolve to be happy. Studies show that people can change their lives simply by thinking happy thoughts. Be happy with what you have, with who you are, with where you're going at this moment.

Resolve to be thankful. People who practice the art of gratitude are happier, more fulfilled. You might start by writing down 5 things you have to be thankful for, or simply speaking words of thanks when you first wake up. It's amazing how gratitude multiplies simply by being expressed.

Resolve to be still. When stress levels rise; when the world around us seems to be flying apart at the seams, stop. Take a deep breath. Remember the words of our anthem: "All people one in urgent haste, on some great enterprise, hearts beating fast, great dreams to realize, *yet* in the soul a dream of richer prize, serene and still. Then striving cease: from troubled turmoil seek an inward goal; tranquility shall make the spirit whole."

Ron Hogan puts it in these simple terms:

Usually, we try to learn something new every day.

But if we want to get right with Tao,

we have to let go of something every day.

We do less and less, until we end up doing nothing.

And it's when we do nothing that we get the job done.

Let events take their course, and everything will turn out in your favor.

[Hogan, *ibid.* Ch. 48]

Stop doing stuff all the time, and watch what happens. You needn't go into hibernation. Start with one minute less. Every journey begins with a first step. Let 2010 begin with this first step. Let

go. Be still. Breathe. Forgive yourself, forgive others. Decrease busyness and increase gratitude. Tell someone "I love you" every day. Every day, give something away--and watch your spiritual wealth grow.

Another year. Where did it go? Into the great wellspring of all creation--the breathing in and breathing out of the universe. It was a good year.

2010. A blank slate. Pristine as a new snowfall. Resolve to lay down your snow shovels and build a snowman instead. Just today. Just this once. Breathe in, breathe out. Be present to your loved ones. Share simple pleasures. Be good to yourself.

2010. It will be your best year yet.

AMEN!