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## **Tao Te Ching #6**

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Empty yet inexhaustible,

It gives birth to infinite worlds.

It is always present within you.

You can use it any way you want.

## **Stewardship Moment - Steve Jones**

from the *Tao Te Ching* as translated by Stephen Mitchell:

*Verse 77*

"As it acts on the world, the Tao is like the bending of a bow.  
The top is bent downward; the bottom is bent up.  
It adjusts excess and deficiency so that there is perfect balance.  
It takes from what is too much and gives to what isn't enough.

Those who try to control, who use force to protect their power, go against the direction of the Tao.  
They take from those who don't have enough and give to those who have far too much.

The Master can keep giving because there is no end to her wealth.  
She acts without expectation, succeeds without taking credit, and doesn't think that she is better than anyone else. "

Many in this world experience a vast unbalance in their community. This is something that we at Emerson hope to alleviate through the efforts of our members by their generosity of time and wealth.

It is in this understanding that we accept this morning's offering.

## **Children's Story - The Woodcutter read by Beth Painter**

*A Taoist Tale from China by Lieh Tzu*

A woodcutter went out one morning to cut some firewood and discovered that his favorite ax was missing. He couldn't find it anywhere. Then he

noticed his neighbor's son standing near the woodshed. The woodcutter thought, "Aha! That boy must have stolen my ax. I see how he lurks about the shed, shifting uneasily from foot to foot, greedy hands stuffed in his pockets, a guilty look on his face. I can't prove it, but he MUST have stolen my ax."

A few days later the woodcutter was surprised and happy to come upon the ax under a pile of firewood. "I remember now," he said, "Just where I'd left it!"

The next time he saw his neighbor's son, the woodcutter looked intently at the boy, scrutinizing him from head to toe. How odd, he thought, somehow this boy has lost his guilty look . . .

## **The Three Jewels of Taoism**

### **Humility - Jason Lang**

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The Tao teaches that humility is the state of embracing what is and not what ones wants to be, knowing one's limits in trying to control everything around us and accepting that many aspects of life will forever be outside of our control. The more one tries to dominate everything around them, the more unhappy they will be and the more anger and strife will be in their life. Happiness lies in accepting this.

The Tao says, "do your job to the best of your ability without attachment to the outcome". The Master understands this and because he believes in himself, he doesn't need the approval of others; because he accepts himself, the world accepts him; because he knows himself, he doesn't need to fight for domination.

I still find this very difficult at times. For example, I spend a lot of my free time practicing the martial art of Aikido. Often, I have found myself feeling a desire to compete and excel beyond all others. I compare myself to the rest of the class and determine how I'm doing by measuring myself against them. Recently, a beginner started and was advancing much faster than I.....suddenly I felt like the worst student there...my accomplishments meant little. When I realized what I was feeling, I understood that by comparing my success to others, I had forgotten the purpose of Aikido....to be in harmony with the universe...the Tao. When I let go of my pride, and just focus on doing the best I can, I can be content in my success...I can leave anger and strife behind.

Another example from my own life that has taught me humility has come from my family.

Several years ago, my younger sister was having difficulties with her fiance and coming to me for a listening ear ....I was SO certain that she was making the wrong choice by marrying this individual, and didn't hold back on telling her what to do! I would think to myself, "If she would just do exactly what I said, and **stop** thinking for herself, everything would be better!! After all, I was the oldest...I had more experience. Darn it!! If she would only do as I say!! I was arrogant, pushy, dominating...and full of my own pride. It was several years before she forgave me and we started to speak again. I was also wrong, and she and her husband have been married for many years now and have three beautiful children. I recognize now that just listening would have been a way to practice compassionate humility, rather than trying to dominate.

## **The Jewel of Moderation - Mark Fish**

### *Tao Te Ching #6*

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The second great jewel of Taoism is Moderation. I've been told to live by western idea moderation all of my life. Go on a diet but don't starve yourself. Don't drive slow in the fast lane, but don't speed. Exercise, but don't overdo it. Drink responsibly. Don't be too sad, don't be too angry, don't be too optimistic, and don't be too negative. Moderation in all things. For the most part, this has all been good advice. But it does kinda get in the way of having fun...

Taoism takes the idea of moderation to a whole new level and it's different from what you might expect.

One facet of Taoist moderation is to recognize and avoid acting or thinking in extremes. When I watch the news, I'm saddened by the extreme views on both sides. Being a moderate, I believe extremist viewpoints divide and hurt our country. From my experience, neither an extreme conservative or extreme liberal philosophy can create a solution which fits every situation. Moderation in this instance recognizes that every situation is unique and must be decided upon its own merits and circumstances. The world isn't black and white. Moderation allows me to have more tools to solve more problems.

Another idea of Taoist moderation is to recognize that we live with limitations, and those limitations allow us to be free. When I was given an assignment in art class a few years ago, I discovered I was more free and more inspired to create, when given constraints (like the size of the canvas, what the subject should be, what tools to use). Creative inspiration came from understanding the limits that were placed upon me. The same thing happens everywhere in life. You've heard about living within your means. That's another example of knowing your limitations. It's not just about staying within your budget, it's about not over spending your time and other personal resources. I know that I've been very tired lately and

that's because I have too many commitments. These commitments are things that I enjoy doing— but because they exceed my time and personal resources, I'm stressed and anxious about doing them. This shows me that I'm not currently living my life in moderation. This doesn't mean I should deprive myself of anything or abstain from things, either. Moderation doesn't say —“don't eat that chocolate”. It says, “Have some chocolate but don't go overboard”.

Moderation and the other jewels apply to more than just individuals. It fits organizations and society as well. The Tao recognizes that individuals are microcosms of the universe. In many of my adventures and personal challenges, I would often learn something new about myself and I would see how it could apply to my family, my company, our country, and even the world. Similarly, when I learn something new about how the world works, I find that the lesson pertains to me personally. So when I recognize that I need to be more moderate with my eating habits, it's not a big stretch to see how my family needs to be more moderate with our spending habits and our country needs to be more moderate with our energy consumption. What's inside us mirrors what's outside us. This also speaks to our own perceptions about our world and ourselves. When we are feeling happy, or sad, or optimistic, or negative, we tend to see the same things in our world. And when the world around us changes —becomes happier or more fearful, sunny or cloudy, it has the power to affect how we feel about ourselves, too. I know that I'm a happier and more positive about myself when the sun is shining. We are interconnected with our world and it is impossible for us to judge ourselves without considering how our environment is affecting us. And it's impossible to objectively examine our environment without first examining how we are feeling. Just like the Woodcutter's Story. What we think is reality is based on what we are thinking, not on what is actually going on.

When I use the principle of moderation as a guide, it steers me toward wisdom and away from extremism. And yes, it is possible to apply the moderation principle even to itself. Too much moderation is not a good thing either. Sometimes we just have to overdo things! Just come back to moderation afterwards.

## **The Jewel of Compassion - Chris Gamlin**

### *Tao Te Ching #6*

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### The third Jewel of Taoism is Compassion.

The Tao has taught me so much on compassion. Compassion is what connects me to every person here today. It can connect me to each person I meet in my life, and with all persons in

the world. It is universal. It does not matter what type or even if someone practices a certain religion. Compassion is always possible.

I have learned through the Tao that in order to have compassion, I must leave all judgment behind. If I have judgment in my heart, I am not truly compassionate. I have thought about judgment and how I could work to remove it from my heart so that I can become more compassionate. I found myself thinking about people I normally just rush by and seldom acknowledge. I asked myself why? Mostly this was happening when I would see a panhandler. I felt I needed to rush by, protect myself and not acknowledge them at all. I now know this is because I was judging them for their situation, how they looked, what they were wearing, and mostly because I was taught that panhandlers were never to be trusted. I am not saying I should not be careful or be aware of situations that may put me in danger, but instead, I am wondering why a smile or at least a kind word should not come from my heart. A panhandler is a person just like me but in a different path in life. Saying hello or offering a warm smile is a simple way I can share my compassion. At some point, I hope to even go beyond the smile and hello. I believe the Tao will help me practice compassion like this until it becomes second nature. Doing so will help me come back to my center and reclaim my becoming a more well-rounded, caring person.

The Tao has also shown me with compassion I am better able to recognize others desires, ambitions, hopes, dreams, heartbreaks, and so much more. For when I am truly in balance with the Tao, compassion will be absolute, thereby allowing me to act more spontaneously without some type of motivation behind how I act. It will allow me to help someone because I am full of compassion, not of selfishness. I found one example of this in my life. I am truly at balance and therefore have true compassion when I am with my nephew, Justin. I will act to help him if he falls and hurts himself without thinking about what I gain, because compassion is in my heart with Justin. I will always rush to fix and kiss his boo-boos, or even just give him a hug when he looks sad or is not feeling well. I have no motivation for doing these tasks, because compassion is guiding me. I feel like those acts, at least for me, are as instinctive as breathing.

I have also found with compassion when I hug you, there is more present than just my embrace. There will be compassion flowing through my heart. Hopefully, through my embrace, you too will feel my compassion in your heart.

## **Homily – Rev. Krista Taves**

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My first experience with Daoism came to me in the form of a story a friend told me. “Daoism,” he said, “is the art of living in a moving river. In that river, there will be stones. Some will try to move the stones seeing them as an impediment to the river. The way of the Dao is different. Be the river. Rather than trying to move the stone, part like the water, and pass the stone by.”

When Jason speaks of humility, he speaks of his desire to leave behind a life where he is trying to move the stone. In the way of the Dao, moving the stone is futile. It is an over-estimation of the power of the self. It is allowing the stone to define you. Live the jewel of humility. Let the stone be what it is.

Mark speaks of moderation, of the art of balance, even to the point of being moderate about moderation. The stone is not immovable. Neither is it powerless. When we live in balance, with full acceptance of the limitations that channel our life into forms we could never imagine, the stone becomes our friend. Perhaps we are that stone offering ourselves as a tool to part the waters, allowing our whole selves to be enveloped and shaped as the water passes us by. Live the jewel of moderation. Allow yourself to change and be changed by all that is around you.

Chris speaks of the compassion she nurtures in her heart as she opens herself to the radical interconnectedness to all that is. The person she passes in the street, her nephew, the hopes and dreams and desires and disappointments of the people around her, and even her own heart. There really is no difference between the stone and the river. Live the jewel of compassion. Be the stone and the river. Both are changed by the other’s presence. The stone is worn away and smoothed, and the river changes course.

When Jenn Taylor came to me two weeks ago and said, “Krista, there’s no easy way to say this, but we’re moving,” it was hard. She’s hasn’t even been with us for one year, and it’s been an amazing year. It kind of feels like she took all the seeds that her predecessor, Lauren Lyerla, so painstakingly planted in her time as our Director of Religious Education, and offered those seeds the nudge that we were finally ready for. And it’s been an awesome river to be floating on. It felt to me like we finally figured out how to simply part and pass by the stones that we’d been trying to move for several years. Jenn has a wonderful way of harnessing the energy that is already there and gathering it into the flow of the river. To us the words of our reading, “The Dao gives birth to infinite worlds. It is always present within you. You can use it any way you want.” We have started to believe that when it comes to our religious education program.

Now I don’t want to make Jenn into a hero because I don’t think that would serve her well or us. This has been a good relationship because everyone is doing their part. We all opened to the possibilities. If we weren’t ready, it wouldn’t have mattered what Jenn did, she would have faced stone after stone after stone in the river. We all made this happen. And might I also say that her predecessor, Lauren, who is still with us, did an admirable job of letting go and empowering all of us to move on and embrace what was happening. Lauren, if anyone modeled the Dao in this last year, it was you.

And now our task is to welcome this change and to open to the possibilities in it. In the way of the Dao, it does not mean stifling the feelings that come with an impending loss. With loss is fear, sadness, grief, maybe even anger. To attempt to stop those feelings is to step away from the jewel of humility, for do we really think we are strong enough to bury our emotions? Can you stop a river from flowing? The way of the Dao is to welcome our

emotions as the flow of the Great Mother, empty, yet inexhaustible.

At the same time, if we get attached to those emotions, make them into idols, that is, to step away from the jewel of moderation. The grief is not the point, it is the path to what lies beyond the grief, which is the reality of new life that comes after loss. Some of us are going to need to grieve Jenn so that we can be ready to embrace the person who will replace her, so that we become open to what is possible with the new energy that will enter our midst, the same way we were open to Jenn less than one year ago, the way we were open to Lauren before her, and Marilyn Ortinau before her, and Betty Maag before her. (What a trip down memory lane just to hear those names.) The jewel of moderation will open that possibility for us.

You know what confuses me most about Tao Te Ching #6? The relationship between the last two lines. “It is always present within you. You can use it any way you want.” What does that mean? “You can use it any way you want.” Isn’t that exactly what the Dao is not about? It’s about humility, moderation, compassion. Doesn’t that last line contradict everything we’ve been saying today? I wonder if that last line is there to show us how easy it is to find ourselves trying to push aside the rock. Of course we have free will. We can certainly use the Dao any way we want, and because we have that ability, we also have the ability to choose wisely and to choose foolishly. Perhaps that’s why the jewel of compassion is so important. We can all look around us and see so many examples of foolish choices and their consequences, especially in other people. And each of us has made our share, undoubtedly seen by those around us. The jewel of compassion is pivotal to live in harmony with the Dao because that is how we become for all living things what Chris can be for her nephew Justin. She’s going to watch him make wise and foolish choices all her life, and she will never stop loving him. We too are called to never stop loving, to never stop forgiving, and to practice humility and moderation and compassion for ourselves and for others when we lose that balance of the water and the rock.

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