

REFLECTIONS FROM THE WAY

Selected essays by Mikhail Goussev

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The Way

*Every person has a path to follow.
It widens, narrows, climbs and descends.
There are times of desperate wanderings.
But with courageous perseverance and
personal conviction,
the right road will be found.
This is what brings real joy.*

Konosuke Matsushita

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Trinity Cathedral in Pskov Kremlin (Pskov, Russia)



INTRODUCTION

This book is a collection of selected essays, which I wrote over the course of fifteen years and previously published in *Wharton Journal*, *Qi Journal*, *A Journal of Russian Thought* and other publications. There is no obvious theme underlying them. Instead, each essay is a reflection on a certain milestone, a lesson learnt, an event that touched my heart or a trip that enriched my view of the world, each having a special meaning to me, perhaps not yet fully understood. While the past is history, I believe that taking a pause to look back can help us calibrate our vision forward by connecting the dots, no matter how random they may seem to be. Looking back I marvel at the opportunities for personal transformation and growth life has presented to me, including the immigration to the United States. The twentieth anniversary of my arrival to the Land of Opportunity served as a motivation to take time and collate these essays into a single book, but it took a bit longer than originally planned.

I was born in Russia in a small historical and sleepy city called Pskov near the border with the Baltic republics. I am proud of my origins and childhood memories are always precious, but I also remember empty shelves in stores, long lines and the ration system allowing each family to only buy a minimum amount of meat, butter and sugar as if World War II was still going on (this was in the seventies and early eighties). Shortage of food also meant shortage of other life opportunities as the local economy was stagnant at best. Life in Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) was much better, but it was virtually impossible to move there as Soviet system of government assigned residency basically prevented any

migration. Fate had it that my mother and I were the lucky exceptions, thanks to my mother's second marriage. The previously inconceivable and unplanned change brought me to Moscow, a move I can compare to a spaceship leaving the gravitational field of the Earth. My step-father, Dmitry Goldovsky, a good and well-educated man (and an expert on the history of space technologies), did everything possible to ensure I got good education as well, and I was able to get into one of the best technical schools in Moscow. My life took on a trajectory far from what anyone could imagine for a boy born in a small provincial Russian city – the twist of events already improbable, as if fate itself gave me her hand.

As my graduation neared, the 'wind of change' – the looming collapse of the former USSR - shook my world again. I faced the need to find my first job at a time when external chaos, uncertainty and inflation could probably be compared to the times after the revolution of 1917 (literally, if we remember a brief, but unsuccessful military coup, tanks on the Red Square and barricades outside the Russian "White House"). A country in economic and political crisis does not seem to need engineers. Virtually all my classmates pursued careers in some form of commerce, which was not my lot (I recall the awkward feeling trying to sell a set of furniture to friends of friends: my first and last deal, which never got closed). Need often pushes us to look for unconventional solutions, and I discovered an artistic side that I did not know I had: I learned how to paint and started to sell my oil paintings to tourists, quite successfully. The semi-bohemian life was fun for a while and helped me get through my last year of college, but I soon knew that I was not Picasso and, following the advice of an older and wiser friend, I resumed my search for an occupation, which would incorporate my formal training. By some stroke of luck,

I managed to get a job as a computer scientist working on a historic joint NASA space mission with Russia in the early 90s to explore the Earth's atmospheric changes. The job was fascinating, but barely paid enough to get food - a country in crisis doesn't care about global warming either and the budget for the project was ridiculous. I recall munching on dry bread all day long to sustain myself during grueling but exciting days of developing the software required to process the data from the satellite we were about to launch. The job provided an unexpected benefit - it opened doors for me to the West - an unconceivable dream for a recent college graduate growing up under the Communist rule. I recall attending an international press conference at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Washington D.C. in complete disbelief: I did not even have enough money to buy a suit (so an old denim jacket did the job), barely spoke English, but yet I was there...

Then came another twist of fate and a blessing: an unexpected visit from a relative from the United States that I didn't even know existed—my step-father's aunt, Ms. Irene G. Wolf. My step-father's family was split during the revolution of 1917, with some of the family members able to escape to Europe and others not. My step-father's aunt was smuggled out of Russia as a four year old girl by a German diplomat, a friend of the family. Seventy years later she decided to visit Russia to find her lost roots. Long story short, Ms. Wolf, a person of infinite wisdom and generosity, became my guardian angel. She virtually adopted me into her family and offered to let me stay with them in Philadelphia while I built a new life in the United States.

Immigration to the US, while a dream, came with a price. The dramatic change in the social environment brought difficulties

and challenges only an immigrant can understand. Yet I believed that as much as destiny shapes our lives, we too could shape our destinies and create the change we wanted. After pulling my share of odd jobs, including a gas station attendant on weekends, a dishwasher in a restaurant at night and an administrative assistant in a medical company during weekdays (all at the same time!), I eventually found my footing and resumed my career in the field of computer technology.

Fast forward a few years and I managed to attend the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, the highest ranking business school in the world – a life changing and shaping experience in itself. Known as a finance powerhouse, Wharton attracts incredibly talented and well-rounded people from all over the world. Among the many unusual people I was fortunate to meet there were a national Taekwondo champion from Australia, an ICU physician who continued flying to his hospital in Canada to practice medicine every other weekend or so, and a Buddhist monk who had spent eight years in a monastery just to name a few. Being there was a privilege and a humbling experience, but I was able to leave a mark by co-founding a Wharton International Cultural Show, which took on a life of its own by being organized by a new team of students every year for over ten years.

Fast forwarding a few more years and I find myself working on Wall Street for one of the largest financial firms. Soon another wave of change swept the world - the financial crisis of 2008. I survived the shakeup that ensued and even got promoted to a position of Vice President in the business area that had suffered the most; I learned a lesson or two about the realities of Capitalism.

Psychological adaptation to the new environment and focus on economic survival made me constantly evaluate the ideals and concepts I grew up with, made me go deep inside and question the nature of the changes that shaped my life in such mysterious, for the lack of a better word, ways and, from that, the nature of change in general. Is it random; is it predetermined, or is it perhaps both? But the most important question for me was: how do we best adapt to the world of changing paradigms without losing the core of who we are?

I was fortunate to have met people in the Russian immigrant community who helped me deal with the challenges of my newly found freedom, and the possibilities and traps it introduced. One of my close friends, Igor Mikhalevich-Kaplan, a Russian poet and journalist had been the source of clarity and wisdom for many years. Another close friend, Tanya Storch, a Russian scholar in East Asian religions, a person of incredible erudition, a mystic and a professor at the University of the Pacific in California had also been the source of inspiration encouraging me to draw from the East Asian philosophical traditions to balance my Western upbringing. The endless conversations with these unique people were invaluable in helping me navigate the change and uncertainty in my early years of immigration and, most importantly, keep me focused on my goals, which transcended purely material success and stability most immigrants aspire to...

This brings me to my long interest in East Asia philosophies, which sometime surprises some of my friends and even me. The paradox I've come to live with is that even though my mind was taking me to the West, the land of opportunity, my heart has always been in the East. Perhaps it all started with my martial arts training as a Moscow teenager. Our sensei put a

strong emphasis not only on the technique, but also on the underlying philosophy of the tradition we practiced. I still vividly remember the exhausting classes and the long-awaited closing meditations. Perspiration drenched, on the brink of fainting from exhaustion, and with closed eyes, I was absorbed in my teacher's slow paced voice narrating stories about the legendary Shaolin Temple and its traditions, which felt so far away, but so familiar in some unexplainable way. As I "grew up" the fascination did not go away. Since then I have had many trips to Asia and visited a number of places of philosophical and spiritual significance including the Shaolin Temple, Wudan Mountain and various monasteries in Tibet and in Japan. Each trip brought unusual encounters and experiences, which are probably a subject for a separate book. I've also taken on the practice of Tai Chi, a soft martial art deeply rooted in the ancient Chinese tradition of Taoism. My Tai Chi teacher of many years, Master Yuwen Ru, is a jewel of his own kind, whose mere existence is living proof that the Chinese fairytale-like martial arts movies are based on some reality.

Even though I had already taken a number of classes in humanities at the University of Pennsylvania, the hands-on interest in Asia did not feel complete, and I decided to pursue formal training via a part-time Ph.D. studies program at the California Institute for Human Science (CIHS) while still working on Wall Street. The school, founded by a modern spiritual giant with an old soul, Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama, attracted me due to its unique curriculum combining classes on philosophy, science and spirituality. I decided to do my dissertation on the study of change based on the Chinese *Classic of Change*, which ultimately led to the writing of this book. Studies at CIHS eventually led to a new page in my

career – I became an adjunct faculty and was offered an opportunity to develop and teach my own online course on the modern applications of the East Asian philosophies, which I gladly accepted. In addition to teaching at CIHS, I also became a part-time instructor at the City University of New York (CUNY) teaching a series of professional and personal development workshops.

Perhaps the culmination of my studies of the East Asian philosophies, at least to-date, was my recently published book, in fact this year, titled *Anatomy of Change: Millennia Old Model for Navigating Change and Uncertainty*. This book is about change, the principles behind it and the effect it has on our lives, through the lens of the timeless Chinese *Classic of Change*, the *I Ching*. In itself this subject deserves the fascination it commands due to its never diminishing relevance. I believe that even the most critical minds will benefit from its distilled and dispassionate wisdom. But this book is also a reflection on the mystery of change through the lens of my personal journey. I've learned through my own experience that change creates openings in the fabric of life and introduces possibilities, which may have been unthinkable otherwise as one can see from my brief bio above.

It is up to us, however, to take risk and to step through such openings into a new reality. In the words of Joseph Campbell, “*There will be a moment when the walls of the world seem to open for a second, and you get an insight through. Jump then! Go! The gates will often close so fast that they take off the tail of your horse*” (Campbell, 1991). ▪

Dedicated to my family, friends and guides with love and gratitude.

*Misha Goussev
November 2013
New York City*

Pskov Kremlin (Pskov, Russia)



ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURAL IDENTITY

September 1998

Discussions regarding the preservation of the cultural identity of various minority and immigrant groups have been numerous, and many of those discussions have appeared to address the issue of protecting the minority culture from the influence of and submergence into the mass American culture. However, how does the minority culture itself seem to be responding to the challenge of survival in a foreign environment? There is a devastating trend of unwillingness among the young generations of various minority cultures to affiliate themselves with the cultural background of their ancestors for the sake of full assimilation into the new surrounding cultural environment. In my opinion, such an attitude neither benefits the society nor the individual, since the gift of being truly bicultural should be considered one of a person's greatest assets.

Being bicultural expands your intellectual horizons. How many people would argue against the benefits of speaking multiple languages? One philosopher once said that each foreign language a person masters could account for a separate lifetime that the person has lived. How many of you have read prose and poetry in their original language, only to be greatly disappointed when reading them in translated form later? There is a lot to be said for the uniqueness of a language and its connection with the customs and habits of a culture, as well as its religious rituals and beliefs. As someone who was raised in

Russia, I have often felt frustrated when I have tried to translate original Russian jokes, anecdotes, or short stories into English for my American friends. Many times, I have promised myself that I would never do it again, but every time, my conscience has been deceived by my desire to share something funny and appropriate to the moment. Most of the time, my only reward has been the puzzled facial expressions of my audience. After a while, I acquired a reputation for telling jokes that are not funny. Some things just do not make sense when they are taken out of their cultural and linguistic contexts. Would it not be just great sometimes to be able to read a book in its original language or to speak to somebody in his or her native tongue? There would be so much more to get out of it.

Being bicultural gives you a sense of having a unique identity and cultural authenticity. We say that we belong to a particular culture, but what is culture? Why do we identify with it? In my opinion, any culture is a product created by many generations of people over a long period of time. A culture is a collection of landmarks left by the best minds that have ever lived and who have identified themselves within this particular culture. A culture is a unique synthesis of the highest achievements that a country or nation has to contribute to the world and to civilization in general. It is that simple; you just automatically become a part of it, affiliated with the very best that your culture has to offer. Furthermore, it is unique, as is your place in it. A culture is like your parents' home: irrespective of where you end up in your life after you leave it, you always come back to it whether in reality or in your memories. That feeling gives you stability and firmness that never fails, regardless of the obstacles that might appear in your life.

What is our relationship with a culture? To me, any culture is a teacher. Culture can help you find inspiration. Culture will open for you the archives of the wisdom of past generations that might help you find the answers to many questions. We all have something to learn from each other and from other cultures as well. Many artists have found inspiration by getting in touch with other cultures. Picasso's cubism, which encompasses some of his most famous works, was born when he came across a collection of primitive African art. Nearly all of the famous American impressionists of the beginning of the twentieth century went to Europe to study the works of renowned masters such as Degas, Monet, Manet, and Cézanne, only to come back and establish their own schools. Many famous writers traveled around the world and lived in other countries, later creating masterpieces written in their native language, but read by the entire intellectual world. A friend of mine who is a professor of eastern philosophy by occupation and a Russian poet by passion wrote a number of short poems in Russian that were greatly influenced by her knowledge of and exposure to the Chinese and Japanese cultures. According to one of the highly recognized authorities on contemporary literature, Iosiph Brodsky, Nobel Prize winner for his contribution to world literature, her poetry added a truly new dimension and meaning to Russian literature that remained unknown until now. A culture is a teacher. The more you study your cultural roots, the more you learn about yourself.

I have mentioned all of these examples to illustrate what a significant influence exposure to a different culture can have on our creativity and perception of the world. Of course, an argument can be made that not everybody was born to be an artist or a writer, but do we not all aspire to be creative and tap into that irrational part of ourselves once in a while? If that is

the case, the gift of multiculturalism can only help to develop that faculty within ourselves.

On the more practical side, the benefits of being bicultural are vast and especially apparent in the contemporary world. Sixty years ago, it would have taken close to two weeks to cross the Atlantic, and some destinations were completely unreachable; however, today, it is possible to have lunch in Paris and return to New York City for dinner. In fact, business travel has become a lifestyle for millions of people. In the era of the multinational corporation, being bicultural is often not a plus but a requirement. For example, one of the requirements to be admitted to the Lauder School of Multinational Business is that the applicant must be fully proficient in at least one foreign language. The graduates of this program generally occupy high-level management positions in the world's leading multinational firms. Needless to say, a skill such as speaking a foreign language takes years to master and polish, unless, of course, you just happened to grow up bilingual.

We might ask whether it is possible to be bicultural. To answer this question, I will turn to an example. My aunt left Russia with her family at the age of four. Until the age of 12, she lived in various European countries, while her mother, a famous violinist, was touring across the world performing concerts. Later, the entire family moved to the United States. An amazing part about my aunt, besides the fact that she had a very interesting and eventful life, is that despite being taken out of the country as a young child, she managed to continue speaking perfect Russian and remained in remarkable touch with the culture itself. Over the years, she has worked and completed multiple translations of prose and poetry from Russian to English and vice versa, participated in multiple cultural events that have taken place in the United States, and

helped many newly landed immigrant families from Russia to settle in the Land of Opportunity. To a large extent, my personal life took a sharp turn and changed forever due to my aunt's love for her native culture.

However, one might wonder what reasons there are that seem to outweigh such obvious benefits of preserving one's cultural identity. Why does it seem that the youth would rather assimilate and forget about their cultural roots? In my opinion, one of the driving factors is the fear of being mocked and made fun of, that is, the fear of not being liked. There is one thing that these young boys and girls forget or simply don't know: by getting rid of this feeling and merging with the rest of the crowd, we lose our sense of self and unique identity, which is arguably a prerequisite of inner strength and stability one will need to deal with the challenges that come later on in life. If you do not protect your own identity now, will you be able to assert it later?

I do not want to convey the impression that I am trying to argue against assimilation into American culture. One of the fundamental ideas of America was to provide every individual with freedom of choice, a variety of opportunities in order to stimulate personal growth and achievement, the spirit of individuality, and freedom. Multiculturalism was and is at the very foundation of the American political system. The very fact that multiple cultures were mixed gave birth to that unique entity that we now call American culture. However, by no means was American culture created in order to suppress and deface its parent subcultures. To do this, in my opinion, would undermine the very foundation of the existing cultural balance in contemporary America. On the contrary, being bicultural

only contributes to the well-being of this unique and incredible country.

A native culture, like many other things in life, is not a matter of personal choice but rather fate. Your culture is always unique, as is your place in it. The opportunity to grow up in multiple cultures, though, is a gift. Like with any other gift, you are free to choose whether you want to accept or reject it. The love of a culture cannot exist in a vacuum. It has to be developed, fostered, explored, and cherished. The inner spark of cultural identity must be carefully preserved like burning coals when there are no more matches left, in order to start a fire on a cold night. This is a gift to you! Take it! ▪

Wudang Mountain Taoist Monastery, China



FROM VOGUE TO TAO

September 1999

My pre-Wharton vacation plans were rather unusual. Unlike most of my classmates who went off to travel and explore the world, I decided to spend some time in solitude in a Taoist temple in the Catskill Mountains, in Big Indian, New York. This decision was not spontaneous, since I had long been fascinated with the East and eastern traditions. However, it did puzzle some of my friends, and I was promptly labeled “monk.”

The decision was made, and I was on my way to the place where the world of the spirit is reality and the mystical chi energy is pulsating from the earth at this major power spot. It is worth mentioning that the location of the temple has a long history. For many centuries, Native American tribes performed sacred rituals on this spot and would never stay overnight, as they were afraid of contact with supernatural powers.

Not surprisingly, I was in a rather deep philosophical mood as I approached Big Indian, preparing myself for the time in solitude, away from worldly temptations. It was raining, and to tell the truth, the closer I got to my final destination, the more appealing the idea of being on a hot tropical island became to me.

I finally arrived. My doubtful state of mind did not last very long because I soon discovered that the temple was full of very beautiful young people (mostly girls) dressed in very exotic clothes. “It is not going to be that bad after all,” I thought to myself. I was a little surprised, however, to see this beauty

following the way of the Tao in such numbers. The explanation soon followed: *Vogue Italy* magazine had come to the temple for a shoot with an eastern theme for its September issue. The little heaven did not last long, unfortunately. A few hours later, the *Vogue* crew packed up their equipment and disappeared just like in the Cinderella fairy tale, which made me wonder whether they had ever existed.

The next day, the fleeting memory of glamour was shattered by the experience that was by far more tangible and real. A huge black bear came out of the woods to the center of the temple to announce its presence and show us who was really in charge. The contrast was so shocking that I was literally numb with awe and admiration for a few minutes. The fear came later. Nothing really dramatic happened afterwards. The bear slowly looked around and then, without paying any attention to the humans, lazily crossed the main field and disappeared into the woods as well. At this point, I realized that the time spent here would be nothing like anything that I had experienced before.

Thus, what is Tao and what do Taoists teach? While the purpose of this essay is not to discuss the philosophical concepts of Taoism in depth, I would like to say that Tao is sharply focused on achieving harmony between one’s personal life and the universe (universal way). Taoists believe that one lives a healthy, happy, and fulfilling life through the achievement of such harmony, and one can even eventually achieve immortality through meditation and special exercises. The Taoist system is based on the concept of the chi (universal energy) that permeates everything in the universe. To put it more poetically, chi is the language of life itself and Tao teaches how to ‘speak’ the silent chi language of animals, trees,

flowers, etc., or hear the inner music of the sun, moon, and stars.

While talking to trees and rocks might be a stretch for most MBA students, I would probably not be incorrect to suggest that most of us would like the idea of healthy, happy, and fulfilling life. Moreover, while achieving immortality is not my immediate goal (completing my Wharton MBA is), I certainly wanted to explore and possibly benefit from the many thousands of years old spiritual wisdom and tradition.

Being at this temple felt just like the pre-term, without the beer. The extremely international group of people represented a vast range of backgrounds: actors (*Seinfeld*), psychologists, doctors, healers, engineers, writers, etc. Classes, which included meditation, exercises, and lectures, started at 6:30 AM and finished at 10 PM, interrupted only by short breaks for meals. A day felt like a week and 5 hours of sleep was the norm. Despite the intense workload, nobody was terribly concerned with doing homework and preparing for exams. The place was happening.

Taoists pay a lot of attention to the well-being of the body in order to achieve the well-being of the mind and soul. The following are some Taoists practices that I had a chance to study. *Healing love* teaches meditation techniques to control and transform various energies in the human body. I am sure that this class would have had a very high bidding price on the Wharton auction, since it has a lot to do with human sexuality. *Chi kung* provides a system of exercises for healing and increasing vitality. *Tai chi*, probably the most widely known Chinese practice, has many labels: martial art, meditation, dance, exercise, etc. In truth, it is all of the above. It is beautiful, tranquilizing, soothing, energizing, and invigorating at the

same time. Some people consider it one of the most advanced forms of meditation. From my experience, I can say that my tai chi moves attract a lot of animals of all kinds (birds, squirrels, rabbits, etc.) who come just to watch me. My friend and famous Russian poet Igor Michalevich-Kaplan^{1,2} wrote the following poem about tai chi and I translated it:

*Tai chi - the movements are precise and calming,
The strong arms floating in the air of nirvana,
And healing wounds,
And guarding from the spirits of the dark
to play a wicked joke.
Yes, youth, still strive
To harvest energy for passion -
to exist and live,
To live so long to watch yourself to kneel
In front of merciless age
and call for the final journey...*

Therefore, what did I take away from all this? I would not call myself a Taoist, neither would I say that I share all Taoists' philosophical concepts, but looking back, I can say that the time spent there was time spent in a different dimension of life. Every single day was charged with adrenaline and joy. The

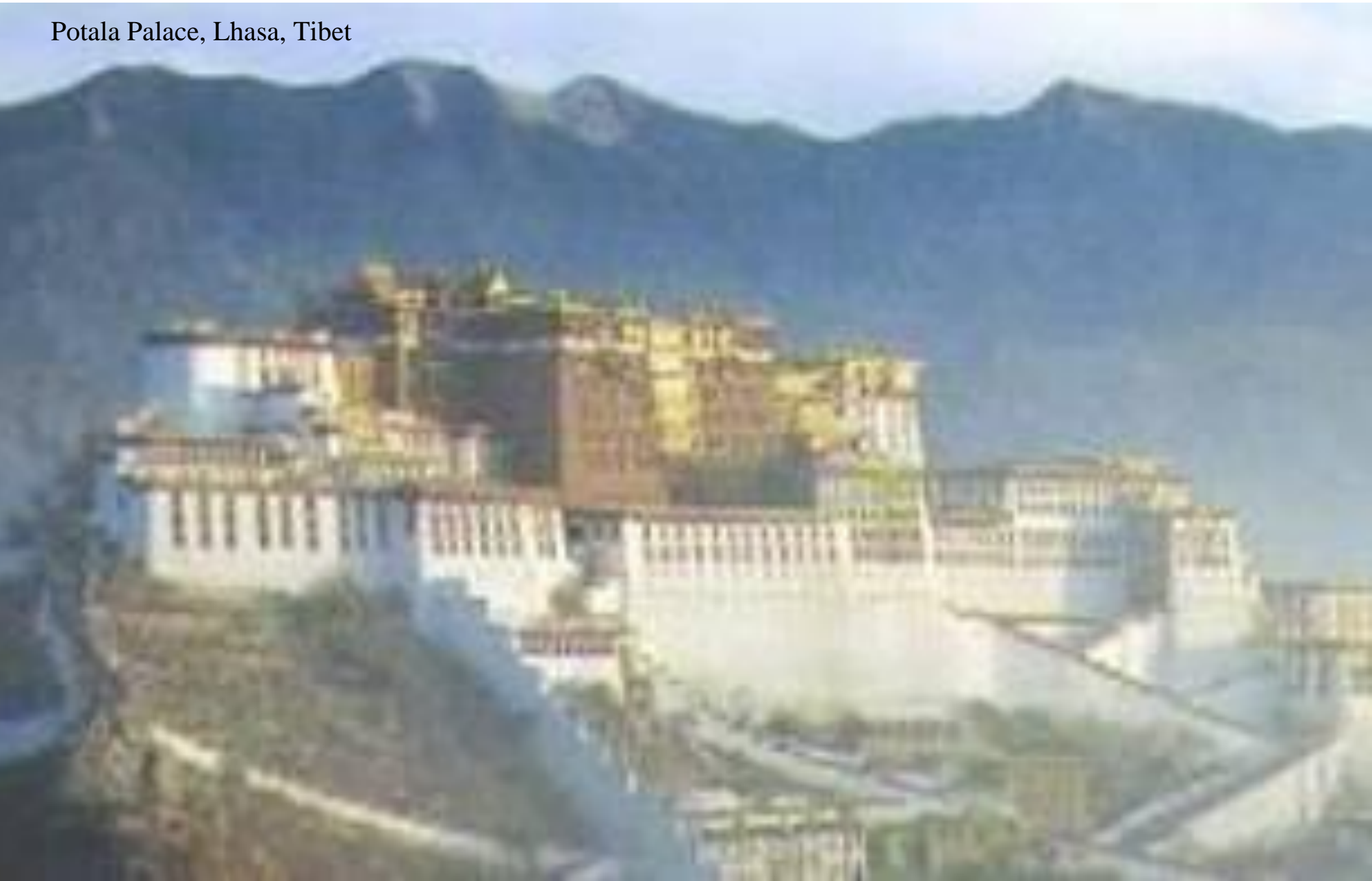
¹

http://www.communiversity.com/schools/university_of_pennsylvania/videos.html?school_id=3840&video_id=285188

² <http://www.coastmagazine.org/about.php>

sense of unity with nature and other people took on a different and much more tangible meaning. I felt the life giving power of a healer's touch. I heard incredible first-hand stories that can only be found in mythology and science fiction books. I felt humble and small facing the ever-present mystery of creation. I felt the cold breath of eternity and the finite nature of human life, and as a result, an extremely strong sense of appreciation for the gift of life that we all share. ▪

Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet



KEYS TO TIBET

September 2000

It all started three years ago, when I received a fax from my friend. It had a picture of Buddha and contained the agenda for the First International Congress on Tibetan Medicine. The event was supposed to be opened by his Holiness the Dalai Lama in Washington, D.C. I was intrigued and impulsively decided to attend. The event made a very strong impression on me, not to mention the fact that I had the opportunity to personally meet his Holiness, the living manifestation of the Buddha of Compassion (the Ocean of Wisdom), according to Tibetan Buddhism. My fascination with Tibet and Tibetan culture did not subside after the congress was over, and the desire to visit this mysterious land translated into one of my long-term plans. The summer between my first and second years at Wharton seemed like an appropriate time for such an adventure. I signed up for a Tibetan tour that would start in Kathmandu (the capital of Nepal), continue over 920 km through Tibetan land via the Friendship Highway, and finish in the holy city of Lhasa, the capital of Tibet.

The Friendship Highway was described in *Lonely Planet: Tibet* as one of the “most pleasant and the most spectacular rides in the world.” I am not quite sure whether it was the wrong time of year to visit Tibet or whether the conditions had changed since the book was published, but our travel was as pleasant as a journey through hell. Nevertheless, it was extremely spectacular. On the second day, we climbed over 5,000 m above sea level, and as a result, the whole group suffered from

altitude sickness. The “highway,” which can be called a dirt road at best, was washed out by the rivers and landslides for about one-third of the way. In addition, Tibetan drivers have a tendency to speed while driving at the very edge of a cliff. Later, having arrived in Lhasa, we discovered that over forty people had died on this highway during the three-week period prior to our arrival. Needless to say, we were very happy to fly back to Kathmandu when the trip was over.

The first thing that struck me about rural Tibet was how it seemed frozen in time. The people, their dress, and the surroundings could have belonged to the fifteenth century; they would have all looked the same then. One would get a similar feeling in the Tibetan part of Lhasa, as it is traditionally flooded with pilgrims from all over Tibet, if it not for the droves of tourists everywhere.

The most interesting and fascinating thing about Tibet for me was its people. Very strong, tempered with harsh weather and the absence of modern conveniences, Tibetans seemed to be etched into this magical land like pieces of gold into a rock. I was continually amazed throughout the trip to see a single person or even a child (you can see them from far away because of the traditional red ornament they weave into their hair) wandering through the mountains without any sign of human civilization for dozens of miles. However, despite their enduring appearance, Tibetans are extremely friendly, curious, and kind people. The most common expression on their faces is a genuine smile that you can see as you wave to them. As a sign of respect, they stick out their tongue, which was quite puzzling to me the first time I was greeted this way. Initially, I was quite reluctant to show my tongue in return. One encounter was particularly memorable: a Tibetan woman (a shepherd)

approached our car as our driver was changing a tire. She did not say a word; she simply stared into my eyes for a minute (perhaps because of my height, I looked like an alien to her). Then she turned around and left. The experience was very tranquilizing, and I did not even think of taking her picture.

Every aspect of Tibetan culture is deeply rooted in Buddhism. Numerous monasteries are full of pilgrims and monks who pay little to no attention to tourists, while going through endless rituals and prayers. It is difficult to describe the feeling that I experienced when I entered my first monastery—a Zhashenlunbu Temple—and faced a 26 m tall statue of Buddha (the world's largest) looking down at me.

While in Lhasa, I attended evening Buddhist services in Jokhang Temple³ (the main temple in Tibet) every night. This place became very special for me. On the second day, I made friends with one of the monks at the temple who showed me around the monastery after the service. He even showed me a number of rooms where no tourists were ever allowed. I walked through the rooms surrounded by ancient statues of Buddha and other deities, most of which were made in the seventh century. I must say that this night alone was worth my entire trip to Tibet. On the following day, a strange thing happened to me. During the service, the abbot of the monastery (I was standing next to him) handed me a big bunch of keys on a chain from the monastery's rooms. The entire congregation was looking at me and I did not quite know what to do. I simply gave the keys back to him after the service and he accepted them with a smile. I would like to think that this gesture had some mysterious meaning that has yet to come to

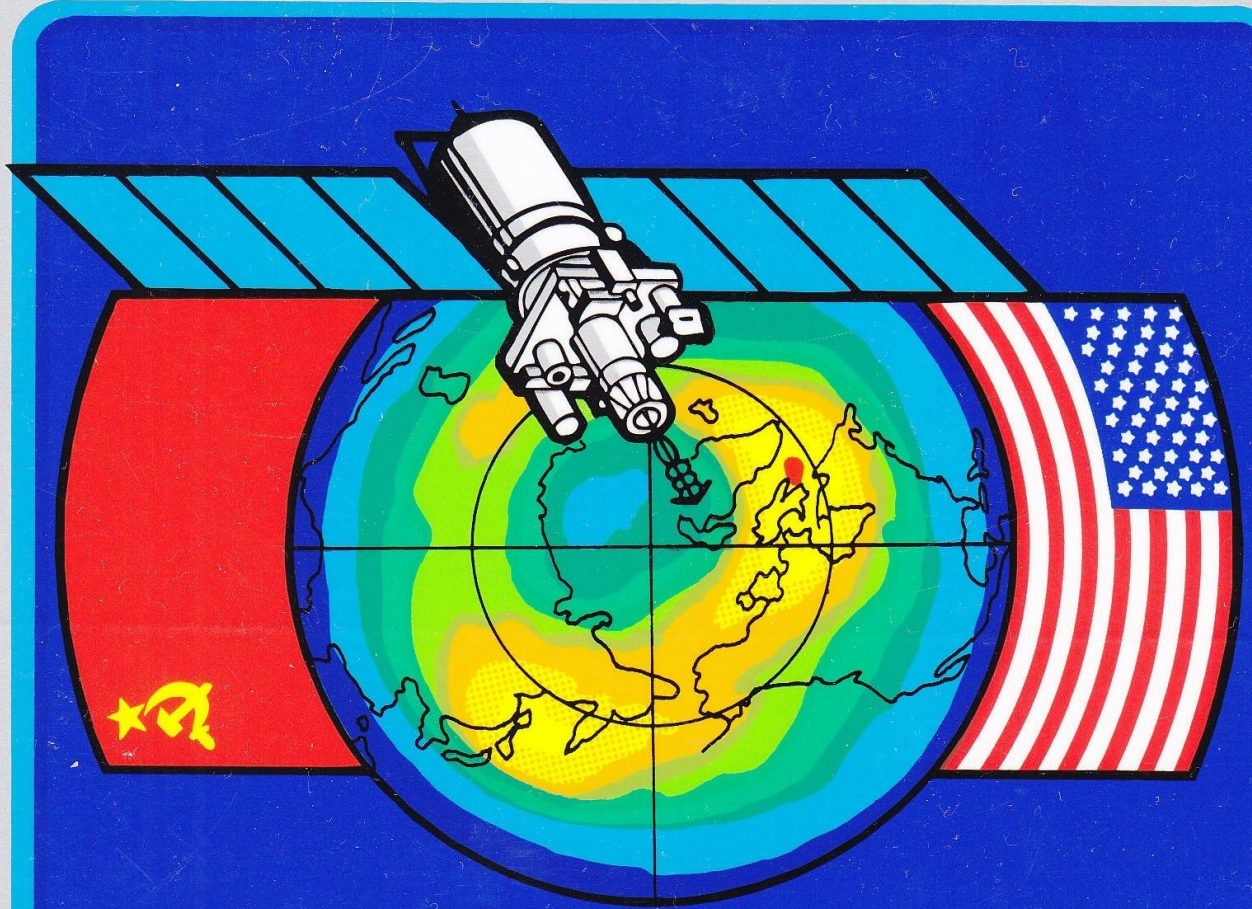
me. I had a feeling that for a short time, I was holding in my hands the symbolic keys to the whole of Tibet.

I left Tibet with mixed feelings, wondering how much of the real Tibet I actually saw. “Modernization” and a non-stop stream of tourists are quickly affecting this sacred land, which used to be closed to western eyes. Yet, in spite of the easy access to the holy place, the ancient knowledge of adepts and spiritual masters, which western science is only now starting to approach, is virtually inaccessible to strangers. I distinctly felt that even though Tibet had opened its doors, it did not reveal its mysteries and its true nature, which might disappear in the river of time, just like some other civilizations in the past. ▪

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jokhang>

СССР · США

ГОСКОМГИДРОМЕТ · НАСА



NASA · STATE HYDROMET

METEOR-3/TOMS

USA · USSR

USA - Former USSR space mission logo, NASA

MY GENERATION

January 2001

Once in a while, when I get into a philosophical mood, I zoom outside myself and look at my existence from the 30,000 feet point of view, both in space and time. When I think of the space, I imagine myself rising very high above the ground—so high that I exit the boundary of our planet and go far away. As I get farther and farther away, I can see our little planet turning into a small, fragile, and very beautiful multicolored ball, surrounded by a very subtle protective shell, just like a fish egg. However, just like the fish egg, it miraculously stores the code of life for many generations to come. When I go even farther, our planet becomes so small that it looks no different than any other planet that I can see from my new location. I start to think of my nuclear physics classes in high school, which I never understood until now. Supposedly, all matter consists of so-called atoms and molecules that hang freely in the space and are connected to each other by some invisible force. Most of the matter inside is empty because of the gaps between the atoms, but it appears quite solid to the human eye from the outside. All this comes to my mind as I am jetting through outer space, and a strange comparison between the atoms and the planets strikes me. Are we all just part of another matter that some other “human” eyes are seeing as just a solid brick?

When I think of time, the feeling is easier to grasp and quantify. After all, history takes place in the same physical space and no tricks are attached. We can all go and see the ruins of the carefully preserved remains of past civilizations, we can see

works of art that appear to us with the same freshness of the colors as if they were finished yesterday, we can read the books and the accounts of historians, and we can even watch movies and see people who created history, but who are no longer with us. Sometimes, I feel that the whole history of humankind, conceivable and inconceivable, is my personal history, dating back centuries and millennia. Moreover, my life is just one day in the ocean of history, as each day in my life is just a day lived by a new person—a new me. It is all the same; as somebody famous once said, each day is like a whole life—you are born and you die every day. However, life goes on. The most astonishing thing about time is the realization that someone else was perhaps living in the same place and having the same thoughts, emotions, aspirations, and doubts a hundred or maybe a thousand years ago!

When I put these two dimensions together, the concepts of time and space acquire different meanings. I see myself as a little star pulsating on the crossroads of two eternities—time and space—two vastnesses that have no limit. Almost anything might even seem insignificant compared to this scale. In this respect, something a former colleague once said many years ago comes to mind. This fellow—a Ph.D. in nuclear physics—always amazed me with his melancholy attitude toward life. Nothing could either throw him off-balance or overly excite him. I once asked him what kept him so calm, and he replied, “Think about it; it takes tens of thousands of light years for the light of certain stars to reach Earth. Why spend time on emotions? Life is too short compared to this.”

Life is too short in human time, I agree. However, since we are humans, perhaps we should use human landmarks to differentiate ourselves in this ocean of time and space. By the

way, I did not even mention other dimensions, since I decided to stick to the plan for the sake of simplicity. Thus, what has happened to the human world in human time during my human life that the other humans from the future would care to know about? A lot. I zoom back in.

First of all, as far as I am concerned, we were lucky to be alive at the turn of the millennium. The fireworks by the Eiffel Tower were the best fireworks human history had ever seen. Even the ancient Greeks would have been jealous. However, on a serious note, the major breakthrough occurred in the field of communications: computers, the Internet, and wireless technology literally connected the whole world into a very tight-knit community with incredible capabilities of data exchange. Once new technologies are developed, within a few years, they become adopted realities that are simply taken for granted.

As I think about the current historical landmarks of humanity, I have a mixed and slightly sad feeling. I feel myself in the position of people who lived on the verge of major breakthroughs in science and technology about a century ago, when many things that are only described in science fiction just started to come true. The true benefits of those technologies were available half a century later to other people living in a different slot of human time. As a side comment, for example, I experience a similar feeling every time I pass by the construction site of the new Wharton building on the University of Pennsylvania campus. It was designed and is being built in the true spirit of the twenty-first century. Yet, I realize with a certain degree of sadness that it is not part of my life, as I will have graduated but the time it is completed and will not be able to attend classes there. Then I think that I am

very fortunate to be able to see the creation process—the evolution of this piece of land from a deep hole in the ground to an amazing and beautiful construction that most Wharton students of the twenty-first century will take for granted.

It may be fair to say that we live in a very unique time in human history. We have already seen that we can fly; we can even visit other planets (the moon or Mars, for example), and we know we could fly even farther if we wanted to. We are constrained by financial issues, not technology. The possibility of flying at the speed of light no longer appears to be pure fantasy; it will probably happen sooner or later.

The latest developments in medicine and biotechnology surpass the wildest fantasies of some of us who are less in touch with scientific innovations. Gene therapy that makes it possible to achieve the reproduction of biologically healthy species that possess the desired characteristics is already a reality today to a certain extent. The issue in question becomes the rate of adoption (again, due to financial reasons) as well as the question of the ownership of these technologies. Along these lines, many of the secrets of Chinese medicine and the *chi* will be scientifically described and implemented into everyday medicine. There will be more humans who will live longer and healthier lives, and some will never die perhaps.

We who live today, in a way, are blessed with the ability to witness the future of humanity as it develops, see new horizons open, and watch as the new secrets of life are discovered, but we know that the new generations will be the ones to fully embrace the new knowledge.

How would I describe our time in the history of humanity? I would say that we are living between major revolutionary breakthroughs in human civilizations. The question I have for myself is whether the coming revolution will have mostly technological and biological consequences or whether it will occur simultaneously with the transformation of the global consciousness of the human species. After all, as the history teaches us, any new breakthrough magnifies both the creative and destructive abilities the mankind possesses. It is the corresponding evolution of consciousness that allows directing the newly acquired powers and keeping the world on the tipping point between progress and destruction. ▪

Shaolin Warrior monument near entrance to the Shaolin Temple, China



THE SPIRIT OF SHAOLIN

September 2001

There are many legends associated with the Shaolin Order that originated from one of most famous temples in China and perhaps in the world over 1,500 years ago: The Shaolin Temple. The superhuman kung fu powers of the Shaolin monks are shrouded in mystery, particularly in light of the non-violent nature of their Buddhist philosophy. The temple is one of the few remnants of the rich past that still exists and functions in the present day, feeding the imaginations of the millions of kung fu practitioners. However, it is unclear as to whether the same can be said about its spirit and tradition.

My personal connection with Shaolin goes as far back as when I was a teenager in Moscow (who knows; maybe even farther, if you believe in reincarnation). I always had a limited passion for organized sports, and for the most part, my participation in them achieved very limited success—I simply never seemed to do the right thing. This changed when I started to practice karate⁴. I was one of the most dedicated students in my karate dojo. I still vividly remember the exhausting classes and the long-awaited closing meditations. Perspiration drenched, on the

⁴ The development of Karate began in Okinawa, an island south of Japan. Okinawans travelled to China, where they learnt the Chinese martial arts. There is evidence of Shaolin martial arts techniques being exported to Japan in the 18th and 19th centuries. Okinawan Shōrin-ryū karate (小林流), for example, has a name meaning "Small [Shao]lin".^[8] Other similarities can be seen in centuries-old Chinese and Japanese martial arts manuals. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ShaoLin_Monastery)

brink of fainting from exhaustion, and with closed eyes, I was absorbed in my teacher's slow paced voice narrating stories about Shaolin and its traditions, which felt so far away, but so familiar in some unexplainable way.

Hence, a visit to the Shaolin temple was at the very top of my to-do list; however, my actual decision to finally make that trip was fueled by a recent performance of the *Shaolin Warriors* at Penn Camps in Philadelphia. Dressed in their bright orange uniforms, the monks appeared as semi-Gods performing a magical dance of vitality, grace, and power. It was truly, as the playbill phrased it, "a celebration of life itself."

Despite⁵ the worldwide popularity of Shaolin kung fu, few people are aware of the true historical significance of the Shaolin temple—the birthplace of Zen Buddhism. The sect was essentially born when an Indian Buddhist monk named Bodhi Dharma visited the temple in the sixth century and taught the concepts of Zen. In reality, Bodhi Dharma was initially refused entrance to the temple and sought refuge in a nearby cave up on a mountain. Strikingly, it was not until nine years later that he was finally permitted to enter.

"There are many roads that lead to the Way, but these contain but two common features: recognition and practice," taught Bodhi Dharma. The term "recognition" is used to indicate that "all living things share a common nature, concealed by the veils of illusion." Furthermore, the "many roads" indicate that self-realization is reached by different souls in different ways through "practice," which may include the various seated and moving meditations, yoga, kung fu, sudden self-realization, etc. However, all of the

⁵ Historical references are emphasized in *italic* throughout the article.

possible routes share the common theme of the recognition of the fact that all life is connected spiritually, and this recognition is essential to reaching self-awareness”⁶.

On a hot and sunny day in June 2001, I arrived at the entrance of the Shaolin temple. I was greeted by a huge statue of a Shaolin monk with his palms locked in front of him in the kung fu greeting. The change of environment beyond the entrance was quite dramatic; the atmosphere was somewhat reminiscent of the opening scene of the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. The hundreds of people dressed in timeless clothes or monastic robes of different colors (primarily bright orange or gray) conjured an image of medieval China. However, I was quickly brought back to the twenty-first century when I confronted the reality that I needed to buy a fairly expensive and contemporary looking ticket before I could continue any further. Moreover, the herds of tourists reminded me that this was the modern day China nevertheless.

Jumping right to the end of my story, I would like to say that I have restricted my narration to just a few episodes and observations in the interest of saving space. It is also worth mentioning that I did not have a plan for the visit; rather, I intended to be spontaneous and in the flow.

Everything in this town screamed kung fu. The air was filled with the simultaneous yells of young monks practicing their art on virtually every open space. Various shops on both sides of the main road were selling martial arts gear and suspicious looking food, while countless non-kung fu looking people approached me to offer me training that would make me the

next Bruce Lee in a week’s time. Despite all this, for some reason, I felt very comfortable.

My first personal contact with the Shaolin monks occurred a few minutes after my arrival. In a state of hazy elation, for kung fu practice, I started to punch a sand bag hanging on the side of the road. I remained absorbed in the exercise until I noticed that I was surrounded by a few dozen young monks who were watching me curiously. Their shaved heads and similar robes made them look very much alike, and certainly made me look very different. However, their smiling faces radiated warmth and friendliness from this curiosity, which facilitated our initial communication despite the language barrier.

I was up for an adventure, as I mentioned earlier, and I did not have to wait too long. Instead of following the path of a normal tourist, the next day, I found myself in the dark basement of one of the temple’s buildings (Shifung Monastery). I am still unsure as to how I ended up there; nevertheless, without hesitation, I stepped into the complete darkness using my camcorder’s night vision to navigate. What I saw covered my skin with goose bumps. The entire room was filled with statues of various monsters, each about nine feet tall, the likes of which could be seen in any Hollywood horror movie. Even now, the significance of those figures is not clear to me. I spent quite a bit of time inside the room battling the desire to get the hell (literally) out of there. That place had a lot of strange power and energy.

Having visited what I would call a Shaolin underground world, my natural desire was to move in the opposite direction, which I did—I decided to climb the sacred mountain where Bodhi

⁶ www.shaolin.com

Dharma spent nine years in the cave. The trip appeared particularly attractive because climbing this mountain meant passing a women's monastery. In reality, the monastery housed only two elderly nuns. I did remember, however, that one of the deadliest Shaolin kung fu styles, Shaolin Wing Chun, was developed by a young nun, reminding us that the role of women in martial arts should not be underestimated. I was very particular about paying the proper respects. Once I made it to the cave, I understood immediately why Bodhi Dharma had chosen it as his residence—the view from the top of the mountain was breathtaking.

Unfortunately, my time enjoying the view was short. The peaceful picture was invaded by a group of western looking visitors struggling, albeit not all successfully, to make it to the top. Since a few of them did not make it, I had the opportunity to chat with them only on my way back down. I quickly discovered that the group was on a mission to make a movie about life at the Shaolin temple in the old days. What happened next was beyond my imagination. The producer of the future blockbuster, a tall Austrian man in his forties, for some strange reason liked me almost immediately, and within ten minutes, asked me to work with them on the production of Shaolin shows around the world. He also made a phone call (I wonder if Bodhi Dharma would have traded his telepathic abilities for the wonders of mobile technology) to introduce me to the dean of the second-largest Shaolin kung fu school so that I could take lessons in qigong², since I expressed this wish. Still experiencing some disbelief, I decided to follow the invisible hand of the Spirit backed up by my gut feeling (probably the same thing) and meet with the dean the next morning.

Shaolin kung fu (often referred to as wushu) emphasizes real combat ability and implies the mastery of various weapons

combined with astonishing control of the chi (or qi)—the life force energy. There is a brief saying that captures some of its essence: “Shaolin monks are like virgins in defense and like tigers in the offence.” The exceptional combat skills played a key role in promoting the status of the Order. During the early years of the Tang dynasty Shaolin monks helped defeat rebel troops during a key Battle of Hulao in 621⁷. As a reward, Shaolin Shaolin enjoyed the royal patronage of the Tang.

The morning after my strange encounter on the sacred mountain, I proceeded to the kung fu school. I would like to take this opportunity to state that no words can capture the extraordinary complexity of my travels in rural China. For the most part, I had to rely on a few handwritten Chinese characters inscribed for me by some kind Chinese soul (I met a few; enough to survive). The rest was pure magic: I would show the precious piece of paper to a taxi driver or a conductor and they would know exactly what to do; it was only a matter of price. Later on, I became more sophisticated and learned how to count and negotiate in Chinese, which made me very proud. I did have to resort to a more traditional method of using fingers as a back-up after an episode where my misunderstanding resulted in me having to pay 40 instead of 4 Chinese Yuan.

Upon my arrival at the school, the magic continued. As I was expected, I was met personally by the dean and an English interpreter. To make the short story long, the dean personally selected a qigong teacher with a personal interpreter for me and refused to take any money. I must say that as nice as it sounds, I do not think that it was done from a purely charitable point of

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ShaoLin_Kung_Fu

view. The Austrian producer seemed to have a lot of clout here, since Shaolin shows provided a steady flow of hard currency.

Judging from the amount of attention that I received from the second I arrived, I think I was regarded as a celebrity, but when everybody witnessed the attention that I was receiving from the dean, I was immediately promoted to the rank of bodhisattva⁸, or something similar. However, this did not prevent my teacher, a young and handsome monk, from treating me as if I was a first grader. He only asked me once whether I really wanted to learn qigong, to which I answered “yes.” Apparently, this was equal to a written consent form waiving any liabilities and transferring full control over my body, mind, and spirit to my new teacher. Speaking of which, with his tall, thin frame, he did remind me of myself in my teens and of my dreams of being born as a Shaolin monk. Who knows how this reincarnation thing works...

The training at the temple was severe and continued for many long years, during which the ability of each monk to retain and guard the order’s secrets and knowledge was tested before more refined skills were taught. Shaolin temples (there were a few in different parts of China, with the main one located in Henan) were, in a way, analogous to contemporary universities. Rigorous studies in philosophy, medicine, music, poetry and writing, history, calligraphy, math, natural and other sciences were at the heart of Shaolin training and focused on the monks’

⁸ In the Buddhist tradition, bodhisattva is either an enlightened (*bodhi*) existence (*sattva*) or an enlightenment-being or, given the variant Sanskrit spelling *satva* rather than *sattva*, "heroic-minded one (*satva*) for enlightenment (*bodhi*)." Another term is "wisdom-being."^[1] It is anyone who, motivated by great compassion, has generated *bodhicitta*, which is a spontaneous wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.^[2] (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhisattva>)

achievement of their utmost human and spiritual potential. Just like in contemporary universities, each student had to pass proficiency exams on all subjects in order to graduate from the temple with the title of Master.

Young Shaolin monks train from 5 AM to 9 PM with a few hours for a break; compared to this, my training was a vacation. I only trained from 8 AM to 6 PM with a 3-hour lunch break. I suspect that the whole thing probably looked very exotic—a tall foreigner dressed in a white silk tai chi uniform accompanied by a young monk in an orange robe with a long wooden stick and an interpreter (he was an English teacher at the school, but his English still needed some work). Once in a while, my “coach” Feng Min would use his stick on my legs to ensure that I performed the exercises properly.

I will save the details of my training for another occasion and say only that each day there for me felt like winning a battle with myself. I had to perform the qigong form for a group of other coaches in order to “graduate” and was greeted with applause at the end. It appeared as though I had passed.

Throughout my short stay at the Shaolin temple, I had witnessed many of the young monks’ feats that they demonstrated to countless visiting tourists. Most Shaolin qigong demonstrations would start with a few smooth but very powerful hand and body movements resembling a some form of magical passes. Various demonstrations, which followed such preparations, included breaking a solid metal or wooden stick over the monk’s head or other parts of the body. More graceful exercises included bending the other end of a spear that pierced a monk’s throat to the ground. However, to me, the most impressive demonstration was that of a monk’s ability to

penetrate a glass with a needle thrown from a short distance. The needle went straight through the glass, making a tiny hole.

A sober spectator might ask what the point is of practicing for many years just to be able to survive this self-torture or demonstrate magical feats. I view this as a simple demonstration of the innate abilities of humans to harness the chi and transcend the limitations of the physical body that are very powerful and still not accepted by the West. Physical superpowers were the key to survival in a battle in ancient times. This is, of course, no longer the case. One of the most powerful applications of qigong today is the ability to heal the self and others.

The last exam for the Master's degree could easily cost a student his life. According to legend, each Master candidate must defend himself while passing through a tunnel filled with mechanical dolls and various traps. The mechanical dolls are designed to deliver brutal blows from a variety of angles, similar to the Star Wars battles against robots. Only one thing separated those who made it to the end from graduation—a gate with an iron ball in front of it sitting over a fire. The ball had two engravings on opposite sides—a dragon and a tiger. To open the gate, the monk had to lift up the ball using his forearms. The dragon and tiger would then become branded on each arm, forever marking the new Shaolin Master, who often had to simply raise his arms and reveal the signs to make his enemies flee in fear.

Things had changed a bit since 500 AD, so my departure from the temple was less dramatic. Upon the completion of my training, I had an official parting ceremony with my teacher and the dean. Nobody was going to brand or even tattoo

anything on my forearms, but I was given an official red-covered diploma with the dean's signature, which I intended to show to my enemies when the need arose.

Thus, the question remains as to whether the spirit of Shaolin is it still alive and well in the hectic pace of contemporary and rapidly commercializing China, and we all must answer it individually. Bodhi Dharma, and Buddhism in general, teach that the nature of the Buddha is eternal and within all of us, which means that each of us has access to it if we choose to discover it. I think that just like in any great tradition, the Shaolin spirit has to come from within, transcending time and space. It is there if you need it. Go and see for yourself. ▪



New York City, view from Jersey City, NJ

ZEN AND THE ART OF LIKING YOUR JOB

February 2003

Do you like your job? Would you still keep your job if you were not paid for it? What would you love to be doing if money were not an issue? Each of these questions is likely to have two different answers – one for your inner voice and one for your boss. Both are tough judges. During a job interview we are expected to make a convincing impression that the position we are applying for is exactly what we need to make our lives complete. Many people can play this game very well. The most difficult questions, however, come from within: what is the right job for me and what should I do with my life?

The conventional wisdom of numerous self-help publications has a simple answer: be honest with yourself, find out what you really love to do and pursue your dreams no matter what. This seems to be the path to true happiness and fulfillment and it is truly difficult to argue against this advice. Po Bronson⁹ in his recent talk at Wharton¹⁰ provided numerous very insightful examples of people, who summoned enough courage to overcome their fears of the unknown and switched jobs in search for the more fulfilling future. Being an advocate of taking proactive action myself, I would like to point out,

⁹ <http://www.pobronson.com/>

¹⁰ Po Bronson's gave a talk at the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania in February 2003 on the topic of his book "What should I do with my life?" This article provides another perspective on this question.

however, that this approach alone does not seem to address two very important questions, which I would like to touch upon in this essay. The first question applies to the best-case scenario: assuming that you did get the job of your dreams, how long will you be happy with it and what will it take to make the sense of fulfillment last? The second question is concerned with the less cheerful, but fairly common situation: you don't like your job, in fact, it is a drag, but due to often very understandable circumstances (have to pay your bills and feed crying children, economy is down, lack of educational credentials, unable to move, you simply don't know what you'd like to do otherwise etc.) you must do it. Is there a way to live a happy and fulfilling life despite this?

I would like to continue by acknowledging the fact that most humans faced the prospects of working in order to make a living since the beginning of time. This has not changed and nowadays, despite the technological breakthroughs and development of the new and advanced forms of societies (in fact people with the best education seem to be working the longest hours). What has changed, however, is the variety of choices available to us now. In the past, the place of one's birth and the status of one's parents, with rare exceptions, determined the geographical location for the person's entire life, and his or her occupation. Given limited choices there was no point in asking 'What should I do with my life?' but rather 'What should I do to make my life more fulfilling given my lot?' In practical terms it meant that the difference between 'happy' and 'unhappy' lives was generally decided inside the person's mind and heart. Those who were able to master their emotions and have control over the inner-selves had a better shot in adjusting to the external conditions and surviving. Today we live in a different world. We commute, change jobs,

states, countries, and receive multiple degrees, generally driven by the search for better and more fulfilling existence. There is nothing wrong with this, but perhaps there are some lessons regarding how we should live our lives to be learnt from our less 'fortunate' and less mobile ancestors?

Before addressing this question I would like to return for a minute to the "dream job" scenario and see whether the accumulated wisdom of the past generations has any relevance in this case. Consider this example. Some people might have a different opinion, but I always naturally assumed that the world of entertainment should be a pretty good place to look for truly exciting and engaging jobs. After all, you are paid to get involved in the creation of the content, which captures minds and hearts of the millions, casual meetings with celebrities are commonplace and the life overall seems like a participation in one big party. Speaking of the parties. It so happened, that during the Christmas holidays I had an opportunity to meet with two of my friends, whom I have not seen for a while. The first meeting took place over breakfast in Manhattan, where the first friend works in the field of investment management. His private clients include the wealthy elite of the media and entertainment industry. The other meeting took place over dinner in Miami on the same day. My second friend is a very successful fashion model, frequently appearing on TV and working with Hollywood celebrities on a regular basis. While both of my friends have very different backgrounds (and the looks ☺), they do have one thing in common. Both have to frequently attend Hollywood parties, film screenings and other events due to the nature of their work. Just as in any field, but probably more so in the world of entertainment, attendance of such events is critical to building the professional network and securing one's future in the field. What seemed like a very

exciting and elitist life style, to my surprise, was viewed by both of my friends as a draining and exhausting obligation. The reason: such social functions are frequent (sometimes as often as a few times per week) and often end long past midnight. Needless to say, the lack of sleep would be a weak excuse not to look fresh and flourishing in front of your potential clients and bosses the next morning. Somehow I did not feel sorry for them since everything being equal I would prefer having drinks with, say, Madonna to working on a consulting case at 3AM in the office. It made me wonder, however, that if even the events organized by and for the elite of the entertainment industry eventually become a drag, what will not? Perhaps a job in the field of fixed income finance could provide some excitement for a change. Or maybe the answer might lie somewhere else?

Just as the necessity to work, the continuous search for the meaning of one's existence has occupied a permanent place in the human history. There are many schools of thought, philosophies and religions, but all of them, to a different degree, attempt to provide models for meaningful and virtuous living. Eastern philosophical thought started to gain particularly popularity in the Western world in recent times. One of the reasons for such interest, in my opinion, is its clear emphasis on contemplation, self-reflection and cultivation of the inner world, "the inner universe", of the practitioner. It is not my goal to contrast or denounce any existing system of beliefs or thought, but rather share some of my observations and interpretation of the Eastern methods of cultivating the connection between the body, mind and spirit with the interested readers.

What does Zen¹¹ have to do with liking one's job? I will try to answer indirectly by sharing some insights I received from one of the business school professors in a private conversation regarding the purpose of work in one's life. The professor's answer to my question was short and took me by surprise since it did not quite fit in my mind into the framework of the traditional business education: "The primary purpose of work", he replied "is not to make a living, but to achieve the highest degree of self-awareness, or enlightenment." The formal philosophy of the Zen Buddhism pursues exactly the same goal – full self-realization and enlightenment through *practice*. The interesting thing, however, is the fact that in Zen philosophy virtually any daily activity, including work, could qualify to be called *practice*, as long as it is done with the 100% concentration and devotion. I have to confess that what follows is my personal and limited interpretation of the subject. I will advise anybody who is interested in this philosophy to read and study it in order to develop personal insights. One of the Zen nuns told me in a personal conversation that she would not be able to explain the concept of Zen to anyone – she simply lives it. This seems to be the case.

The problem with having enlightenment as the ultimate goal, however, is that very few people can explain what it really means (most, however, agree that it is a good thing to have). A more comprehensible explanation, in my mind, is that Zen practice empowers the practitioner to achieve the state of inner harmony and peace regardless of the external circumstances life has to offer. The spectrum for potential application of Zen

¹¹ Zen Doctrine was introduced by an Indian monk Bodhi Dharma around 1500 years ago after he spent seven years in solitude in a cave in the vicinity of the Shaolin Temple in China. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zen>, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/zen/hd_zen.htm)

training is rather wide. The Japanese warrior class (samurai) adapted Zen philosophy as a way to attain the single-pointed concentration vital for their military spirit. On the other hand, a traditional Zen monastery would likely to be one of the most peaceful places on earth you'd ever visit.

There are a few schools of Zen, but all of them emphasize sitting silent meditation *zazen* as a way to "obtain freedom from the wild "monkey mind" that runs chattering about and reaches for the "sky-mind" of Zen emptiness."¹² Surprisingly enough, the seemingly easy concept of non-action, or sitting still for a considerable period of time, can be a very difficult task for most people. Zen practice of emptiness aims at creating the inner space, more accurately, the inner Temple, inside our minds and hearts to which we can have access at any point in time. Such state of the "sky-mind" allows us to be both the observers and the participants of the intricate flow of energies in our daily lives, which manifest themselves through a never-ending chain of events and actions. The observer side of ours keeps an eye on what is happening and maintains the link to our higher self, while the participant's side allows us to be involved in the action and live our daily lives. From a purely philosophical perspective, Zen, as well as Buddhism in general, teaches that the nature of all things in this world, both good and bad, is finite. It teaches that each event has both negative and positive sides and it is in our power to learn how to embrace both. We are free to choose our prevailing state of mind and derive joy and fulfillment even from the most mundane and routine events. After all, each event, no matter how insignificant, constitutes what we call our *lifetime*, which

¹² "The Best Guide to Eastern Philosophy & Religion", Diane Morgan, 2001, p.168

passes into the irrevocable past with every second. We might as well learn how to find positive sides in everything regardless of whether or not we truly like what we do.

So what is the right job for me and what should I do with my life? Just as the life of each person is unique, so the answer to this question is unique. My goal in writing this essay was to share my view that while the diligent and methodical (sometimes radical!) search for the right job is important and will yield certain results, even more important is the inner transformation and understanding of our place and our role in this world. I do believe that people should strive towards a better future, look for more fulfilling jobs and life styles, as well as for opportunities to continue personal growth. This might mean taking risks, experimenting, making mistakes and sometimes going in reverse. It is inherent in the human nature. On the other hand I believe that it is our attitudes and the inner philosophies that ultimately determine how content we feel with our lives and with ourselves no matter where we are and what we do in life. I also feel that in our time of scientific discoveries and overwhelming choices we still have something to learn from our ancestors: the secrets and methods of the inner alchemy, which directly address the issues related to the human soul, spirit and emotions. The Zen tradition is just one of the many schools developed and refined by humanity in an attempt to bridge the gap between the inner and outer worlds we, humans, exist in. There is no need in becoming Zen monks or nuns in order to benefit from this ancient wisdom. If nothing else, perhaps its “sky-mind” philosophy could be beneficial for some people in helping to find a meaning and purpose in each task or job at hand, no matter how unexciting it might be. After all it is up to us to choose to view our lives as exciting,

meaningful, but often difficult journeys, rather than a random search for immediately gratifying opportunities and rewards. ■

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WHARTON INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL SHOW: MERGING CREATIVITY WITH THE BUSINESS SIDE

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Do artistic creativity and self-expression belong to the world of finance and sober business acumen? In the pre-Enron era, the answer to this question would have been a definite “yes.” One possible application for such a combination of talents, that is, creative accounting, was an acceptable practice in some very well-known corporations. However, in the world of media and entertainment, the line between the business and creative sides of the operations has always been clearly marked and seldom crossed. Each side presumably requires a unique set of expertise and talents that the other side presumably lacks. This might be true in the world of “big entertainment,” but certainly not in the Wharton MBA environment, as has been successfully demonstrated by two 100% student run productions: the *Follies*, and still young but quickly becoming the school’s legacy, the *Wharton International Cultural Show* (WICS).

I have had the privilege to be involved with WICS from its very birth as a member of the founding team, the artistic director, and a performer. As some of my friends have already done so, I would like to offer my perspective on how it all

Left: Front page of a playbill for the First Annual WICS

started, and share some memories and insights. Looking back, I must confess that the work on the show was the most powerful experience I have gained during my time as an MBA student (besides the DIP week, of course), as it provided the most revealing insights into the true spirit of the school and the richness of the talents of the student body.

In the beginning, there was an *idea* that was introduced to the world by Nimish Doshi, the producer of the first show. Despite the magnificent end result, the beginning of WICS could be compared to that of a typical start-up in a garage. The lack of capital or experience was well compensated by the excess of energy, dream-like vision, and contagious desire to create. Even though the Wharton environment provided virtually unlimited opportunities for all tastes to get involved and apply their talents, the idea of the show immediately struck me as truly unique and extraordinary. Thus, when I received the e-mail that Nimish sent to the entire school introducing the idea of the show, I was hooked immediately (proving that direct marketing works). However, the first meeting was less than spectacular and produced only half a dozen volunteers and as many suggestions for the cultural acts. Even though the energy was high, it was a poor substitute for a robust strategy that would somehow fill up the thousand seats of the Irvine Auditorium. A couple of subsequent meetings could also be compared to an attempt to navigate a spaceship by a team of intelligent and overly optimistic beings, but without any relevant experience. However, we learned quickly, as in any other Wharton team assignment, and soon, the structure of the show started to come to life. Synergy, a common goal, and a “just do it” attitude seemed to be taking us the long way; however, not all the way.

During our first technical visit to the Irvine Auditorium facilities (the venue for the first show), it became apparent that no teamwork or synergy would replace at least some amount of hands-on experience. It is no accident that I compared our show to a spaceship. The beautiful and majestic building of the Irvine Auditorium itself, with its dozens of lights, mysterious backstage quarters, cathedral-like ceiling, and glassed operator’s deck positioned some 40 feet above the audience with a couple of spot lights shooting down on the stage, in my mind, resembled a giant spaceship from *Star Trek*. The building certainly had a personality and contained many memories of past performances. The opportunity to bring it to life for one night and become a part of its history was both exciting and intimidating. The need for someone with prior experience in running stage productions became obvious, and given the proximity of the show, quite urgent.

Johan D’Costa entered the WICS world as a savior. Not only did he have plenty of experience as a technical lead on other productions, he also agreed to spend 30 minutes of his time to give us a crash course on how to do it. The 30 minutes turned into at least 50 hours. At this point, it is difficult to judge what made him sacrifice himself—the passion for the artistic expression of the MBA students or a cute member of the WICS management team—but in the end, he was ours. It was only after he completed the first draft of the “tech cues” (the actual step-by-step technical script of a show) that I realized how far we would have been from success without his precious knowledge.

It is worth saying a few words about the first and only full rehearsal that was supposed to take place one day before the show, but in reality, never happened. The day of the production

was the first time the show had run in its entirety. Of course, it was not planned this way. We simply underestimated the art of the union workers (all stage workers by law belong to a union) to do nothing but appear to be very busy. The logistical nightmare of coordinating 25 acts with more than 100 performers who, for the most part, had never been on stage, took its toll as well. For whatever reason, we never had enough time to run the show through, and, therefore, we were not sure whether it would actually run through.

The show was nearly sold out (about 90% of the seats were sold). I remember watching the auditorium filling up with a mixture of feelings: elation, haze, pride, and curiosity. After all, all of us, despite the fact that we were the organizers (and many of the performers) were also the audience who came to see the show for the first time. I remember persistently thinking to myself, “It will either be a spectacular success or a spectacular failure.” Somehow, after all the work we had put into it, I felt very calm about either option.

The audience was crying, screaming, yelling, and basically going nuts. Some acts were more spectacular than others, but all together, they created an unbelievable experience of color, energy, music, and variety—a variety of cultures, costumes, personalities, and emotions. It was truly a celebration of life. The performances were so professional that it was hard to believe that the students or their partners had done it all. The striking fact about the performance was the unanticipated unity of the audience with each act. Since the friends, classmates, or family members of each member of the cast were in the audience, it was almost as amazing to watch the reaction of the viewers as the performance itself. Contributing to the overall atmosphere was a healthy competition among different cultural

groups for the loudest support for their act. After all, it was an *International Cultural Show*. As the show was under way, few people would have been aware of the intense communication taking place via the intercom system, which connected the technical team with the back stage managers. Sometimes, I wish we had had it recorded for posterity, but frankly, most of it would probably not have been printable. Jokes aside, we experienced virtually no technical glitches, not counting the lonely spot light that shone at a wrong time only once.

It is hard to believe that this year, the show is celebrating its third anniversary. It seems to have acquired a life of its own and is rapidly building its alumni base. Many prospective students from the Wharton Welcome Weekend of 2002 mentioned that they had chosen Wharton over other schools after seeing the show, and I am not surprised. These are the kinds of people and personalities that the school attracts and who, in turn, make the school so exceptional.

I look at the show as much more than simply an organized way to have fun on stage after class. I view it as an opportunity to learn how to use business skills, creative thinking, intelligence, teamwork, and communication to enable visions to become realities, to inspire, to create, and to make an impact. After all, I believe that all of the great creations of humanity begin with inspiration and dreams, which are part of human nature. I also believe that technical competence, hard work, and business acumen, in many cases, are important prerequisites to such creations. WICS was merely one example of how the business and creative sides can work together and produce synergy. I would like to thank all of my teammates and everybody involved in this very unique production for making it happen and keeping in alive as the years go by! ▪



THE CORPORATE SHAMAN

November 2004

The reputation and clout of the Wharton School of Business spread far beyond its hometown of Philadelphia. In fact, it is world famous. This finance powerhouse and management think-tank is known to produce experts of the finest quality due to its cutting edge research, technology, and world class faculty in virtually all areas of business. Corporate empires reserve a special place for the graduates of this fine institution, expecting them to bring in almost magical powers and superhuman skills in return for top salaries and sign-up bonuses. It is not surprising, then, that the main hero of a business saga *The Corporate Shaman* by Richard Whiteley is a Wharton graduate. As the reader might expect, Jason, the hero, saves his client, an established corporation, from financial collapse. What does come as a surprise, however, are the methodology and techniques employed by Jason to achieve his objectives—Shamanism—the ancient tradition that dates back many thousands of years.

Before embarking on the topic of shamanism, which might be a new word for many readers, let us first take a deeper look at Jason's life. In many ways, Jason is a success story. A talented businessman, he has fulfilled the dream of many, but the reality of a few—he co-founded a company on a shoestring, out of a garage, and grew it into a multi-million dollar international corporation. However, this dramatic success does not come free. A heart attack in his mid-40s and a divorce force him to face the rather common mid-life crisis question, "What's next?"

Left: Morgan Stanley headquarters, Times Square, New York City

In addition, Jason feels deep disappointment with the way the business culture has gradually evolved from that of family-like bonding and support to a “dog eat dog” environment, where behind the formal smiles, one can often find chilling indifference and concern solely for one’s personal well-being. Passion for the future of the company and personal pride in the success of the business are being effectively replaced by the computer-like logic of the corporate machine, which seems to have a mind of its own. Jason begins to feel that something is fundamentally lacking in his world or that perhaps it has simply been lost. The search for the answers to this dilemma turns into a life journey on the path of personal development and self-realization with shamanism at its core.

The word shaman is a Siberian word for “one who sees in the dark.” It refers to healers who, for over 40,000 years, have entered altered states of mind at will and journeyed to other worlds using the power, wisdom, and energies of those worlds to create positive change in people and the environments that they inhabit.”¹³ Traditionally, one of the main goals of a shaman has always been to heal either an individual or the entire community or tribe in two possible ways: by either retrieving an essential part of the client that has been figuratively lost (soul retrieval) or by extracting a foreign entity or energy that caused disease and lack of balance. However, the role and responsibilities of a shaman have always been very complex and multifaceted and have often gone far beyond traditional healing.

Therefore, how can this pre-historic and, in a way, fantastic form of “problem-solving” help modern corporations equipped

¹³ “The Corporate Shaman,” Richard Whiteley
(<http://www.corpshaman.com/>)

with the most innovative technologies and groundbreaking business techniques? What kind of value can shamanism bring to modern communities, for that matter? Before delving into this topic, let us pose an esoteric question that might give us a hint and some direction: does a company have a soul? We frequently use the intangible concepts of the *soul* and *spirit* metaphorically, almost on a daily basis, when we say that something touched our souls or refer to the team spirit or even spirit of a nation and its people. We also often talk about *corporate culture* and acknowledge that each organization can be unique in that regard. Therefore, it can be argued that both the organizational culture and its spirit play critical roles in shaping the organization’s identity and possibly its financial future and prosperity. Perhaps a lack of loyalty, inner harmony, and balance among employees are the first signs of the decay of an organization, which has lost its spirit, or maybe, the soul. In this context, the ancient shamanic practices might provide valuable insights and even tools to help deal with this problem.

Jason’s client, an established mid-size corporation, is caught in a crisis, which is perhaps recognizable to the management of many other companies. Originally functioning as a well-balanced organization with healthy profits and growing sales, the company gradually begins to lose its edge as well as its competitive position, despite the strong economy and booming industry. The CEO of the firm, without realizing that he himself could potentially be the cause of the downturn, begins pointing fingers at his executives, which only further exacerbates the situation. Some of the best talents begin to leave the firm and the company’s future, which only recently was promising and bright, starts to look grim. Given the healthy external conditions, it is reasonable to assume that perhaps the problems the company faces are internal in

nature—speaking in the language of shamanism—the company has lost its spirit. To make a long story short, Jason, a Wharton educated business consultant and shaman in disguise, has been very skillful in helping the company retrieve its original spirit via the use of shamanic healing ceremonies. It sounds rather unbelievable and spooky. Is there even a fraction of reality behind this seemingly fantastic fable? Perhaps we can learn a little about the author of this work and take a look behind the scenes of his creation.

Mr. Whiteley’s professional career was stellar. He co-founded one of the largest consulting firms in the field of leadership development and organizational behavior, The Forum Corporation¹⁴, on an initial investment of a few thousand dollars, only to sell it 30 years later for \$90 million. I found it important to mention the monetary value of the financial success here not from the perspective of the material gain, but rather to acknowledge Mr. Whiteley’s credentials and true mastery in the business world. After all, the bottom line has always been one of the most important criteria for success in this field.

Richard Whiteley’s life, as successful as it is, presents its own challenges and questions. Having acquired wealth and social status, he realizes that his ultimate mission in life is to do much more. He feels that his calling is to leverage his skills and talents to help bring the spirit back to business and the corporate community. This realization and its practical applications do not come overnight; they result from many years of personal development practice and inner growth.

¹⁴ Please visit Forum Corporation’s website for more information at www.forum.com

Thus, what is it about shamanism that makes it the tool of choice to tackle contemporary business problems from the perspective of an accomplished western businessman? Here are some of the thoughts and insights that Richard Whiteley shared with me during our conversation.

First of all, just as in business, shamanism is very customer and results oriented. The main function of a shaman has always been to undertake spirit journeys on behalf of other individuals and communities. The clients are generally the ones who decide whether the shaman will stay “in business” and is worthy of his title. Only if he is able to produce tangible results and help solve real problems will the shaman be nominated for this privileged role.

Second of all, shamanism is not a religion. In fact, even the term *spiritual tradition* should be used with care in relation to shamanism. Shamanism is pre-historic, and unlike most religions, is based on the direct personal experience of communication with alternative realms of consciousness and existence. While many shamanic methodologies and rituals can be taught and transmitted from generation to generation, the interpretation of each event, experience, and result is a matter of personal belief and understanding.

How does it work and does one have to believe in spirits in order to benefit from shamanic methods? The answer is, “it depends.” As Richard Whiteley points out, in his experience, 100% success comprises 70% of the work and effort done by the client himself, 10% on the part of the shaman, and 20% from the help of the spirit. Therefore, the client must believe in something or at least to be open to the possibility of the supernatural and miraculous entering his life. However, it can be argued that our interest in the supernatural and the

mysterious is not a rare quality, but rather, a universal need, similar to the need for water or shelter.

The interest in ancient wisdom traditions such as shamanism and their potential applications in the workplace and corporate world appear to be part of a more widespread phenomenon than one might think initially. As Professor Ian Mitroff of USC Marshall School of Business says, “Spirituality could be the ultimate competitive advantage (as long as there is no bully-pulpit promotion of traditional religion).”¹⁵ A study conducted by McKinsey of Australia reported that when companies conduct programs that utilize spiritual techniques for their employees, productivity improves and turnover is greatly reduced. Essentially, spiritually-centered practices are manifestations of a wider trend that many organizations attempt to follow in their own ways, that is, to go beyond the bottom line and create a culture that promotes company loyalty, employee bonding, team spirit, and ultimate workspace satisfaction. The following research shows that companies that use high involvement techniques outperform traditional hierarchical command and control organizations on key business indicators: (a) 160% more growth in sales, (b) 400% more growth in profits, (c) \$15,000 to \$60,000 greater market value per employee, (d) 200% more patents, (e) 500% revenue, 800% earnings, 1,200% stock growth, and (f) 700% more income growth.¹⁶ It is not surprising or interesting, then, that “the oldest and most consistent use of this powerful tool [shamanism] in modern time has been in the higher levels of the business world. This is probably because the upper level

business person, like the shaman, is vitally concerned with what works.”¹⁷

Perhaps I will not be too far off if I compare Richard Whiteley’s main character Jason in his book *The Corporate Shaman* with himself and his own life story. An MBA graduate of the Harvard Business School and a very successful businessman, Richard dedicates his life energy and passion to help bring the spirit and soul back to the business community. His personal success and dedication constitute the best testimony to the practicality of his beliefs, life’s work, and vision. In his own words, Richard does not intend to promote shamanism as the ultimate solution to life’s problems and challenges. Instead, his view on this subject reflects the fundamental concept of shamanism itself: use it if it works for you, and if it works, why question it? See for yourself. ▪

¹⁵ “A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America”, Jossey Bass

¹⁶ Various researchers including: Kravetz, Heskett, Kotter

¹⁷ “The Way of the Adventurer”, Serge King, Chapter 12 of “Shamanism”, compiled by Shirley Nicholson



New York Stock Exchange, Wall Street, New York City

THE TAO OF DOW

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“East meets West” has become a popular slogan nowadays reflecting the reality that many aspects of the Eastern cultures, particularly from China, Japan and India, have occupied a permanent place in our vocabulary and lives. Chinese restaurants, acupuncture, karaoke, yoga, Tai Chi & meditation, as well as “Made in China” labels are a few examples of such integration of the East into the West. Western technology, management practices and the exponential growth of manufacturing due to abundant supply of cheap labor are just a few examples of such integration of the West into the East. The next step in the fusion of cultures is integration of their underlying philosophies and values. After all, the Dow, which became the symbol of the Western philosophy of the free market economy, and the Tao, the Eastern philosophy of ancient China, are not that far apart from each other and, perhaps, can help create a true fusion between the East and the West.

Let’s take a look at some principle differences and similarities between the worldviews of the East and the West in order to understand how they can work together. The foundation of the Western thought and science is based on the Cartesian philosophy of dualism. In practice this means that the Western science attempts to understand the world around us by studying its individual components and continuously breaking them down into smaller parts. The Eastern philosophy, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the relationships between the

individual parts and the roles they play in the overall system. A classic example is the difference between the approaches in Western and Eastern medicines: the West generally focuses on diagnosis and treatment of individual organs, while the East traditionally views symptoms as a sign of the dysfunction between organs and attempts to restore balance of the whole organism. It can be argued that both approaches are important and really complement each other.

What is Dow? The term Dow stems from the Dow Jones & Company, which publishes the world’s most vital business and financial news and information. One of its key divisions, Dow Jones Indexes, develops, maintains and licenses market indexes for investment products. Among its more than 3,000 indexes is the world’s best known stock indicator, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, often referred to as the Dow. The Dow essentially reflects the pulse of the economic activity of the world.

What is Tao? The word Tao in Chinese means “The Way” – the Way of Life, the Way of the Universe, the way things are. The concept of Tao is very illusory and difficult to grasp, yet very real at the same time. As one ancient classic said, “The Tao is the law of nature, which your true self can’t depart from even for one instant. If you could depart from it, it wouldn’t be the Tao”. A modern scholar further explains this idea “You can’t see it, but you can see its effects, the way physicists can trace the path of a sub-atomic particle through a cloud chamber”. The Tao essentially reflects the basic laws and principles of the Universe and the pulse of all that exist.

The Tao of Dow? So, if the Tao encompasses the entire Universe and all that exists, is the Dow a part of it too? If so,

can we use the language and the principles of the Tao in order to gain deeper insights into the inner-workings of the Dow? If yes, what are the principles which could help us build a bridge between the Tao and Dow? There are many, but let's focus on three main ones (as it is customary in a classic argumentative essay): *Oneness & Interdependence*, *Change* and *Mystery*.

Oneness & Interdependence. Can the economic activity of the world be viewed and studied separately from the rest of human activities or even from the rest of life on the planet? Of course not. Many factors directly or indirectly impact the flow of economic activity or are impacted by it. For example, political instability or war in one part of the world can and does impact the economic activity in the other. Similarly, legislature, science, education, medicine, art & culture etc. can all impact and change the course of economy. The opposite is also true, the economy can and does impact most other areas of human activity and even non-human - the Mother Nature. In the efficient market, the Dow is more than just the best known stock indicator – it is an indicator of the organized human activity of the world.

As stated in Chapter 25 of the *Tao Te Ching*¹⁸, the book of Taoist philosophy and probably the most translated Chinese text into English language:

¹⁸ The *Tao Te Ching*, roughly translatable as *The Book of the Way and its Virtue* (see below), is a Chinese classic text. According to tradition, it was written around 600 BCE by the Taoist sage Laozi (or Lao Tzu, "Old Master"), a record-keeper at the Zhou Dynasty court. The *Tao Te Ching* is fundamental to the Taoist school Chinese philosophy and strongly influenced other schools as well. Its influence has also spread widely outside East Asia, aided by hundreds of translations into Western languages. (Source: Wikipedia)

There was something formless and perfect
before the universe was born.
It is serene. Empty.
Solitary. Unchanging.
Infinite. Eternally present.

It flows through all things,
inside and outside, and returns
to the origin of all things.

It is the mother of the universe.
For lack of a better name,
I call it the Tao.

Even though the immediate connection between the Tao and Dow may not be apparent, with some contemplation we can see important parallels. The life force of the planet flows as a result of the two principle forces: the force of Human Progress and the force of Nature. Both reveal a high level of complex order, creativity and organization. The human activity is reflected in the workings of the Dow, while the acts of Nature reflect the workings of the Tao. It just seems as common sense that both have to work and co-exist in harmony as both are parts of the whole.

Change. Those who worked for a modern multinational corporation (at least in the West) know that the change is the only *const* in this environment. Increasingly dynamic market forces, fierce competition and strict regulatory requirements make business strategy obsolete often before it is executed, any

Note: The passages from the *Tao Te Ching* referenced in this article, except for Chapter 62, are from the version translated by Stephen Mitchell (Publisher: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2000)

forecast virtually impossible beyond six month. Continual internal restructuring and change of management is rather a norm - the executives often rotate like in the musical chair game. "Nothing is sacred!" stated one senior manager at a monthly officers meeting of a large financial services firm, implying that any aspect of operations of the firm can be changed in order to improve competitiveness and profitability. And he acts on it.

Chapter 74 from *Tao Te Ching* echoes this challenge:

If you realize that all things change,
There is nothing you will try to hold on to.
If you aren't afraid of dying,
there is nothing you can't achieve.

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 your hand.

This passage, even though relevant to the notion of *change* faced by management, may present a dilemma in the context of the modern and largely control-oriented business environment. After all, it states that absolute control is impossible to achieve, and even the relative control has its price. The dilemma is mostly artificial, however, since *change* is inescapable reality of life, which we need to embrace and deal with and not confront. This is the art and wisdom of management.

Mystery. Finance is quantitative science. A balance sheet is the ultimate judge of the success or failure of any financial endeavor. The Dow speaks the language of the dollar

displaying the unfolding dance of rise and decline of inherited fortunes and hard earned savings in real time. The best minds are working tirelessly in the attempt to predict or even influence the course of the Dow (with the help of super computers of course). Yet, little has changed from the times of Adam Smith¹⁹, who coined the term the "invisible hand"²⁰ of the market²¹. Even though the economic mechanism of the supply vs. demand is well understood, its outcome can never be predicted with certainty – nobody can say for sure when and

¹⁹ **Adam Smith**, (1723-1790) was a Scottish political economist and moral philosopher. His *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* was one of the earliest attempts to study the historical development of industry and commerce in Europe. That work helped to create the modern academic discipline of economics and provided one of the best-known intellectual rationales for free trade, capitalism, and libertarianism. (Source: *Wikipedia*)

²⁰ The **invisible hand** is a metaphor invented by Adam Smith to illustrate how those who seek wealth by following their individual self-interest, inadvertently stimulate the economy and assist the poor. In the general opinion, in *The Wealth of Nations* and other writings, Smith claims that, in capitalism, an individual pursuing his own good tends also to promote the good of his community, through a social mechanism that he called "the invisible hand". (Source: *Wikipedia*)

²¹ One of the main points of *The Wealth of Nations* is that the free market, while appearing chaotic and unrestrained, is actually guided to produce the right amount and variety of goods by a so-called "invisible hand" (an image that Smith had previously employed in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, but which has its original use in his essay, "The History of Astronomy"). If a product shortage occurs, for instance, its price rises, creating a profit margin that creates an incentive for others to enter production, eventually curing the shortage. If too many producers enter the market, the increased competition among manufacturers and increased supply would lower the price of the product to its production cost, the "natural price".(Source: *Wikipedia*)

how the market is going to use its “invisible hand” over the long-term. The Dow is a mystery.

More than two millennia prior to Adam Smith revolutionary ideas on economics, *The Tao Te Ching* captured the same thought in the following passage (Chapter 77):

As it acts in 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.

But just in the case of the Dow, the end result of the inner workings of the Tao is more of a mystery than a science skillfully orchestrated by the “invisible hand” of the archer (if we were to follow the analogy of the passage above). Chapter 1 of *Tao Te Ching* says:

The tao that can be told
is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named
is not the eternal Name.

And then continued:

Free from desire, you realize the mystery.

“Infinitely marvelous, yet as ordinary as sunlight. Impossible to know, yet as easy as touching your nose when you wash your

face” (from commentaries on *Tao Te Ching* by Stephen Mitchell).

“Today, scientists call the creative principle at work in the universe the ‘principle of self-organization’²² from the observed fact that naturally occurring phenomena organize themselves into complex interdependent systems each system a ‘whole’ in itself. At the heart of this remarkable self-organizing principle is a somewhat mysterious entity that is unconditioned yet gives rise to everything”. (Source: Wikipedia)

The correlation between the principles and philosophies of Tao and Dow appear to be clear, but can this be extended beyond the intellectual curiosity? Perhaps. Just as the Dow, the Tao is a very practical philosophy and is based to a large degree on the empirical study of the reality. A unique aspect of Taoism is its focus on applications of its philosophy and knowledge to help dealing with the issues of everyday life. Chinese Medicine, for example, being one of the fundamental Eastern healing systems referred to earlier, is fully based on the principles of Tao. The *I Ching*, or the “Book of Changes”, is another empirical system developed by Taoists a few millennia ago.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of Tao is based upon the understanding that the only constant in the universe is change, and that we must understand and be in harmony with this change. The *I Ching*, which is the oldest of the Chinese classic texts, is a symbol system designed to identify order in what seem like chance events and centers on the ideas of *the dynamic balance of opposites, the evolution of events as a*

²² **Self-organization** is a process in which the internal organization of a system, normally an open system, increases in complexity without being guided or managed by an outside source. (Source: Wikipedia)

process, and acceptance of the inevitability of change. Volumes of research have been written on the topic of the *I Ching*, many by some of the finest minds (e.g. Carl Jung studied it extensively in context of his theory of *Synchronicity*).

The subject of the *I Ching*, however, is beyond the scope of this article. It is important to mention, however, that interest to the *I Ching* in nowadays spread beyond academic circles. For example, Thomas Cleary in his work *The Tao of Organization* mentions that the modern Japanese organizational genius Matsushita Konosuke, founder of Panasonic and other multinational corporations, built his success on the principles of the *I Ching*. David Payne in his novel *Confessions of a Taoist on Wall Street* gives a fascinating account of the quest for Tao within Dow with the help of the *I Ching* of a Taoist monk, who grew up in the tranquility of an Oriental monastery and later found himself in the tumult of the New York Stock Exchange.

Despite the fascinating similarities between the ancient philosophy of Tao and the modern financial science of Dow, there are important differences between the two. The difference is in the sustainability and their respective long-term effects. As discussed earlier, the key driver behind the Dow is the economic growth, fueled by ceaseless consumption of the material goods and the natural resources. Admittedly, the economic development and growth have given humanity tremendous benefits of the civilization: modern cities, global communications, travel, prolonged life span, science and so forth. Such growth, however, without proper balance, can be compared to a run-away train rapidly gaining speed towards potential self-destruction. The knowledge and skill without wisdom and vision can be even more dangerous than ignorance.

Some of the side effects of the economic growth, such as eco-disasters & pollution, overpopulation and now global terrorism, indicate that the “invisible hand” of the market does not necessary have all the answers to help the human kind in its quest for well-being and survival. In fact, it can be a two-edged sword. Perhaps Lao Tzu, the legendary sage of the East, was foreseeing the potential dark side of the industrial revolution twenty five hundred years ago when he said:

By keeping the people
from knowledge and desires,
he disables wise men
from taking any active action.
Act in accordance
with this principle of inaction
and the world will be kept in order everywhere.

(Chapter 3, *Tao Te Ching*)

Unlike the Dow, the Tao, reflects the course of Nature and the Way of the Universe. It embraces and factors in all known and unknown laws of physics, which modern science is slowly discovering and deciphering step-by-step. The Tao teaches the principles of balance, harmony and long-term sustainability. The way of the Tao is not the way of knowledge, but the way of wisdom. The wisdom, which the industrial Dow, equipped with the technical knowledge of the markets, often looses behind the drive for the short-term gains and lack of consideration for the long-term effects of the uncontrolled growth.

The comparison between the Eastern Tao and the Western Dow is not just an intellectual exercise. Knowledge has to be

coupled with wisdom. And it takes time to acquire wisdom. Perhaps the ancient wisdom of Taoism can add to the knowledge of “Dowism” and the two can work together to create a more sustainable future. The reference to the Eastern philosophies in the context of modern Business is not new. For example, much attention has been given to the ancient Chinese classics on strategy, such as *The Art of War* and *36 Stratagems*. By the same token, the *Tao Te Ching* and the *I Ching* offer the wealth of timeless wisdom and practical advice to help contemporary managers deal with specific day-to-day problems, as well as develop long-term visions and organizational missions. As stated in Chapter 62 of *Tao Te Ching*²³:

Honors can be bought with fine words,
respect can be won with good deeds;
but the Tao is beyond all value,
and no one can achieve it.

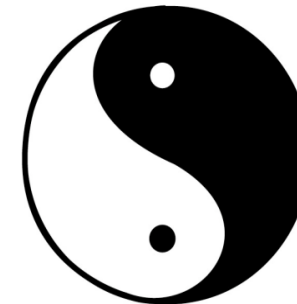
Thus, when a new leader is chosen,
don't offer to help him
with your wealth or your expertise.
Offer instead
to teach him about the Tao.

The question of whether to search for Dow within Tao, or for Tao within Dow, or whether to search at all is personal in nature. The fusion of the East and West is already occurring with the rapid speed whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. The Cartesian Science of the West is slowly, but surely adopting the holistic worldview of the East and vs. versa.

²³ Zhengkun, Gu (translator) (1995). *Lao Zi: The Book of Tao and Teh*. Beijing: Peking University Press.

Despite much skepticism, China once again is emerging as a powerful empire, consistently with its historical past. The next level of integration between East and West is on the level of cultures, philosophies and consciousness, beyond science and material needs. The study of the mysterious Tao can help us gain insights into how to deal with the problems and side-effects of the miraculous in their own ways economic growth and scientific discoveries. After all, East and West make the world whole. The fusion of Dow with Tao may prepare humanity to taking a next step into the future with the help of the wisdom of the past and based on the knowledge of the present. ▪

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It's a prime time to laugh
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very funny

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FROM TAO TO DOW: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

September 23, 2008

NEW YORK. With the stock market running wild and financial world reshaping itself in a silent catastrophe most of us are asking the same question in an attempt to make sense of the reality: where do we go from here? Unlike traditional disasters, no matter how devastating, the financial disasters cannot be seen, heard or even felt. Yet, the magnitude of it can be so severe, that the government is willing to spend close to 1 Trillion US dollars in order to prevent even a greater damage, let alone, a collapse of the entire financial system. By comparison, Hurricane Katrina, the costliest hurricane ever in the US history, cost the United States an estimated \$110 billion in damages. What is worse, unlike a hurricane, a financial tsunami originates from the deep waters of human psyche, largely mysterious to most, and goes on impacting all aspects of the global economy in ways we cannot even imagine. So, what should we expect next and who should we turn to for an answer?

The financial markets are one of the greatest inventions of humanity. Without getting into a lot of technical (and moral) details, it suffices to say that the efficient markets are incredibly sophisticated computing systems, capable of assimilating and quantifying an incomprehensible amount of data about the past and present and making projections into the future. There is one problem though – these projections can

change directions abruptly and without warning (consider, for example, the fluctuation of Dow by over 1000 points during the week of September 15)... Or they can be corrected, by either regulators or short-sellers... Time and history will show us up to what extent the markets were right about the future, but to some degree if you trying to make sense of where the markets are heading now you may as well be using a crystal ball...

Speaking of the crystal ball... Ancient Chinese have developed a system to navigate and manage *change*. They understood that *change* was an inevitable part of life. But they also understood that change was a product of the myriad of forces, both visible and invisible, all of which influenced the flow of events and shaped qualities of the present moment exactly as it should be. They called their system the *I Ching* or, in translation, the *Book of Change*. Venerated by emperors and scholars, the book was labeled as superstition in modern China for its use in the art of divination, or the ability to foresee the future...

The subject of the I Ching deserves at least a separate article, if not a book (and dozens have been written). Without getting into the technical details, I would like to share with you the advice I got from this ancient text in response to my question: “*Where do the markets go from here?*” “PUSHING UPWARD”, I Ching replied, “*Activity grounded in truth brings progress and good fortune... Progress as a tree does, bending around obstacles rather than confronting them, pushing upward steadily but gently... The time is ripe for progress if you put forth an effort that is innocent, sincere, and balanced.*” The I Ching further comments on the path to success: “*Success is attained as a result of your careful attention to self-examination and self-improvement*”. Despite the positive tone,

the I Ching also cautions us to endure as the situation progresses further and “*remain steady and allow the world to reshape itself*”. “*It is not a time to let the ego swell with successes nor to despair at misfortunes. It is simply a time to hold to the path of essential truth.*” “*It is likely that a change has occurred, or is about to. It is your responsibility to hold your course and go on without regarding this change,*” counsels *I Ching*.

I would not take the burden of interpreting the words of this ancient text for the readers and sharing my understanding of this message. The advice was given specifically to me in response to my question. Every person is different and it is conceivable that different people would be given different message. Once thing I do want to share. Spending ten minutes consulting the I Ching gave me a tangible sense of peace, clarity and stability so much needed in the time chaos and turmoil. The sense, which I could not get from the conflicting and disturbing news and media updates. It as if I heard the voice of wisdom speaking to me through the centuries, the voice which seemed to saying “*...and this too shall pass...*”

I would like to finish with a quote from *The Tao of Organization* book by Thomas Cleary on the role of the I Ching in business analysis: “*Analysis and projection are fundamental elements of rational ‘divination’, much as is done in the markets, whether for the sake of an orderly market or for the sake of personal advantage. The I Ching includes an extra element, one that is often the deciding factor. This is the element of the possibilities and practicalities of human development. Throughout its long history, the I Ching has probably drawn as much interest along these lines as it has for its well-known use in projection, and in practice the analytic,*

projective, and developmental elements must always work together in some way.” ■

Dow Jones Industrial Average (INDEXDJX:DJI)



Above: a snapshot of Dow Industrial Average chart as of November 22, 2013, over 5 years since the crash during the financial crisis of 2008

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田中町 岡本博秀

西清洲 打田暁代

田中町 有小川工業所

名古屋 寛田玉仏具店 恩玉容子
丸之内
合資会社 水野電器商会

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田中町 岡本治療院 小川芳子

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清洲町 富田重忠

上条 アンダー工業株式会社

下本町 小笠原隆

下本町 前田宇三郎

Shinto shrine gates at Hiyoshi Temple in Nagoya, Japan

ANOTHER LOOK AT JAPAN: ENLIGHTENED CAPITALISM

January 2010

As the world is entering a new phase of globalization marked by virtually unlimited technological possibilities on the one hand and by very tangible problems of global warming, terrorism and financial uncertainty on the other, the need for new models of society, our relationship with nature and co-existence between countries is becoming more and more obvious. While the West was leading the Industrial Revolution, the East may be instrumental in helping us develop solutions to many challenges that come with it.

This article invites readers to take another look at Japan, the country full contrasts and paradoxes, in search of inspiration and possible answers. Japan, in my view, is a unique example of a highly industrialized democratic (!) society, which is able to maintain its position as a leading economic power, while preserving its core cultural principles and a true union with nature. Perhaps it is one of the working examples of the sustainable development models the West is moving towards- a form of Enlightened Capitalism.

If the 19th century was the age of the industrial revolution, the 20th century was the age of technological breakthroughs, which forever changed the dynamic of life and literally made science fiction become reality. While the pace of the technological evolution in principle allows for the possibility of colonization

of the Moon (and perhaps even Mars), the question of immediate importance is where we go next as the human race here on Earth? In other words, what models of society and co-existence between countries will work best in the 21st century?

I would like to invite you to take another look at Japan, the country full of contrasts and paradoxes, in search of inspiration and possible answers. Despite its small size in geographic terms, this tiny islands-based country has become one of the world's leading economic powers (third after the US and China).²⁴ Even though the Japanese economy has been in decline since the 1990s, officially entering into a recession in 2008, one can't help but be surprised by the level of technological sophistication, advanced public infrastructure and the overall vitality of the society upon visiting Japan. Even temporary workers without a permanent home (read "unemployed" and "homeless") have an opportunity to sleep at a capsule hotel, once a symbol of Japan's prosperity and built for the businessman who worked too late to catch the train or stayed out drinking all night.²⁵ Finally, despite its prominent status in the world, as both an economic power and a cultural attraction, Japan remains surprisingly closed to the Western influence and maintains its ancient roots and traditions in its DNA behind the façade of modernity.

My experience with the Japanese lifestyle, customs, and worldview has a long history and is multifaceted. In my early

²⁴ CIA World Factbook (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2001rank.html?countryName=Japan&countryCode=ja®ionCode=eas&rank=4#ja>)

²⁵

<http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/01/07/japan.capsule.home/index.html?iref=allsearch>

teens I remember being deeply touched by a Russian writer, Vsevolod Ovchinnikov, who did a masterful job in comparing and contrasting key cultural nuances of Japanese and British culture in his book *Sakura and Oak*. For instance, he explained, when placing a vase on a table, a Japanese would instinctively place it asymmetrically, while Westerners would generally put it in the center. This minor detail highlights an important aspect of the Japanese national character, namely, to follow the natural order in everything. And nature, as we know, does not tolerate symmetry. Like the majority of teenagers around the world (or at least in Russia), I grew up worshiping Japanese electronics as the manifestation of perfection of quality of sound and image. In my later teens I began practicing *karate* and learned Japanese terminology for punches and blocks, as well as stories about the life of “the father of modern karate” Gichin Funakoshi.²⁶ Finally, after my third year at university, I decided to spend my summer break near the Sea of Japan as a member of a geological expedition to the Far East of Russia. Despite the geographic proximity, Japan continued to remain a mysterious and abstract land and culture for me.

Fast forward twenty years, and I found myself living in the United States, having graduated from Wharton, and working on Wall Street in New York City. Despite my immersion into the world of finance, my fascination with East Asia and Japan in particular never lost its grip on me, but became even more important. Since then, I’ve had several opportunities to visit Japan, every time discovering something new and becoming more amazed by its delicate culture and hard-working people.

The first impression is always powerful. One can’t help but be surprised by the quality of the customer service and the overall

public infrastructure everywhere – not just in the major cities. Train conductors wearing white gloves and bowing reception staff are not perks limited only to the first-class passengers and five-star hotels, but a *norm* everywhere. Clean public bathrooms and spotless common areas *everywhere* redefine the standards of hygiene. Most importantly, an *always* up-to-the-minute precise transportation system inspires a sense of awe and provides a feeling of security and reliability – whether you are traveling by plane, local metro, or by bus in a remote mountain region. Brief observation and conversations with the locals reveal that the high standards are not the results of the laws and regulations, which are of course vigorously enforced too, but are upheld mostly based on the strong work ethic and commitment to do the absolute best at one’s job. Japanese are known for being hard workers and for putting in long hours, but it’s not quite obvious why. On my question to one Japanese manager why he chooses to spend often up to sixteen hours a day six days a week at his job he replied: “It is a Japanese thing – you will not understand...”

Japanese are also known for their efficiency at recycling and taking great care of their environment. This, perhaps, can be explained more easily with the rationale that a country with the third largest economy in the world and with severely limited natural resources due to its geography does not have a choice but to recycle. This is certainly true but, again, the commitment to recycling is not so much a result of the government laws and regulations, which of course exist, but rather stems from the internal understanding of its importance by ordinary Japanese citizens. If you have doubts about it, consider how effective the anti-littering laws are in the United States and especially in New York City.

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gichin_Funakoshi#cite_note-0

Finally, the hard work and commitment to do best for the society pays off for Japanese (or at least it used to). Most Japanese companies guarantee lifetime employment for a substantial portion of the urban labor force, a benefit that has now began to erode due to the dual pressure of globalization and domestic geographic change. Nevertheless, Japanese enjoy one of the most technologically advanced lifestyles and the highest life expectancy among the developed countries, and third in the world (according to the *CIA World Factbook*).²⁷

Not everything can be painted in rosy colors, as there would not be an upside without a downside. On the flipside of Japanese advances in many areas and the nation's overall success is the need to conform to the customs and the way of life. Compared to many Western countries, where individuality is taken for granted due to the makeup of the fabric of the society consisting of various ethnic groups and cultures, in Japan individuality is not a norm, but rather an exception. A homogeneous people, Japanese seem to be living a very communal life, and in many respects place the interests of the society above their own individual interests – to put it in a very simplistic form.

This is rather a curious paradox considering Japan's leading economic power and the ease of access to the Western world (for example, many countries do not require visas for Japanese citizens), including the United States' influence after WWII. A historical reference may provide some perspective on this. In the period of 1603 to 1854, Japan was literally isolated from all foreign influence by the Tokugawa shogunate (military dictatorship) in order to secure its power. Perhaps it is during

²⁷ *CIA World Factbook* website:
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ja.html>

this period, as the West was entering the Age of Enlightenment (as a precursor to the Industrial Revolution and science), that Japan was developing and solidifying the inner core of its culture before opening its doors to the West and the resulting modernization.

Perhaps it is due to its conformist culture that Japan ranks rather low on the Life Satisfaction scale²⁸ (#34) and comes behind all Western countries. To be objective, I have done additional research on how Japan ranks against other countries in a variety of categories and I was rather disappointed – the numbers paint a picture which is rather controversial:

Apart from its high life expectancy, relatively good health, low crime rate, and reasonable GDP per capita (far from exceptional, though), Japan ranks well behind Western countries in all other fields, from freedom, democracy and gender issues, to quality of accommodation, life satisfaction and happiness. So, *based on these numbers*, can Japan be considered a good place to live from the point of view of quality of life? Worldwide, yes, but comparing to almost any Western countries certainly not.²⁹

Despite this sobering summary, we have to consider this information in the context of the opening question of this essay: What models of society and coexistence between countries will work best in the 21st century? In the short-term the Western model, which is largely based on the assumption of unlimited resources and unceasing economic growth, certainly produces

²⁸ http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/lif_lif_sat-lifestyle-life-satisfaction&int=-1

²⁹ http://www.jref.com/society/japan_world_ranking.shtml

the return we all benefit from. The big question, however, we have to ask ourselves is whether these returns are going to last and whether these assumptions are going to hold true indefinitely. The current wealth creation machine must be fueled by unceasing (and ever increasing!) consumption on the one hand and by the availability of low-cost production facilities (like the ones offered now by China and India) on the other. Neither is a likely scenario in the long run. Absolute growth is a fantasy – whatever comes up must eventually come down based on the laws of physics. What we call “progress” today is generating an equally powerful and offsetting force we will have to deal with as humanity as a whole in the not very distant future. Many minds are trying to foresee what this future may be. One such scenario has been brilliantly painted in the recent movie *Avatar*, showing humans as colonizers of a remote planet in search of profit and material resources, as our own planet was no longer able to provide for us in the 22nd century. In his book *Powerdown: Options and Actions for a Post-Carbon World*, Richard Heinberg presents and explores four main scenarios for how our civilization may develop once the lack of resources becomes imminent as a result of continuous growth and industrial expansion: *Last One Standing: The Way of War and Competition*, *Powerdown: The Path of Self-Limitation*, *Waiting for the Magic Elixir: False Hopes, Wishful Thinking and Denial* and *Building Lifeboats: The Path of Community*. I will leave it up to the reader to decide whether this list is comprehensive, but I would make an argument that the playbooks for all four scenarios are already being written and tested today.

As I am personally a believer in the superiority of the capitalist democratic system over others (despite some serious side effects), I see hope in the emergence of the so-called

Enlightened Capitalism scenario as the next phase of the evolution of society, where *external* competition (and greed being an extreme form of it) must be coupled with an *internal* sense of responsibility for one’s actions and the realization that the individual freedoms we all enjoy must also be unified with the collective consciousness and Mother Nature.

What does this have to do with Japan? As we experience difficulties due to the constraints of resources, pollution, overpopulation, wars and other problems, we may be forced to surrender our individuality (at least parts of it) for the sake of higher principles in order to survive. This has already been evident based on reactions to recent cataclysms such as the threats of global terrorism and the financial crisis. In both cases, as a result of retaliation, we have lost some of our individual freedoms for the sake of security and stability. As we continue to face global challenges and threats, new models may be required to help us deal with them. While the West was leading the Industrial Revolution, the East may be instrumental in helping us develop solutions to many challenges that come with it. Japan, in my view, is a unique example of a highly industrialized democratic (!) society, which is able to maintain its position as a leading economic power, while preserving its core cultural principles and a true union with nature. In the event, if the future of human kind comes down to choosing one of the four scenarios presented by Heinberg, I would make an argument that Japan is better positioned among the developed countries to adapt the path of self limitation and/or the path of community, as these principles are already deeply embedded in its cultural psyche and way of living. I also believe that Japan is a working example (or the closest approximation) of the *Enlightened Capitalism* model, and allows us to have a glimpse of one of the futures the world will face in the 21st century. ▪



Buddhist fire ceremony at Ekoin Temple on Mount Koya (Koyasan), Japan

JAPAN IN DISASTER: LESSONS ON CIVILITY, SPIRIT, AND RESILIENCE

March 2011

In disbelief, the world watches the aftermath of the monster tsunami that struck Japan on March 11th. It is becoming clear that we are witnessing events of historic proportion, perhaps not only for Japan, but for the rest of the world as well. In the eve of spring, Japan was hit by a triple strike. Unfolding as if in slow motion: first, there was the wave, which previously could only be seen in futuristic movies of apocalypse. Second, the looming nuclear disaster threatened to cripple Tokyo and its vicinities. Lastly, low temperatures and snow hampered rescue efforts and further threatened survival. Note that I did not mention the 9.0 magnitude earthquake, which was responsible for the tsunami, since it alone did little damage—a testament to Japanese engineering and preparation. The severity of the situation and further uncertainty, due to the hundreds of aftershocks and the grave situation at the Fukushima nuclear plant, is powerful enough to test the spirit of the strongest. Nonetheless, the Japanese people remain calm, civil, considerate of others, and organized. This is in the face of the worst adversity to befall their nation since World War II.

Having travelled to Japan multiple times, I, like many other foreigners, was simply amazed by the level of organization, technological sophistication, and moral standards interwoven

into the fabric of the society. Trains running with the precision and reliability of a Swiss clock (Casio would be just as appropriate for comparison), spotless common areas, and exceptional service virtually everywhere, are just a few examples of the external manifestation of the fundamental internal qualities of Japanese society: the deep sense of duty toward one's community or group ('shuudan') and one's job. I felt compelled to reflect on this in my prior article, "Another Look at Japan: Enlightened Capitalism."³⁰

Based on commentaries appearing in the media, we can now see that Japan's societal mores remain strong even amid disaster: "...unlike other disasters where the world has observed looting, rioting and public outbursts of sorrow and rage, it has seen a country quietly mourning, its people standing patiently for hours in orderly lines for a few bottles of water. [...] At stores across the city, long, straight lines of Japanese tsunami victims have been waiting for rations in the city. No one is directing these lines; they're organized by the people themselves. [...] At the front, which takes hours to get to in some cases, shoppers are limited to 10 food or beverage items. No complaints, no cheating."³¹ A heartbreaking story of the rescuer, Kenichi Suzuki, who lost his entire family, including his wife and four grandchildren, after he left his home to help close the tsunami protection wall at the first signs of the disaster, illustrates this quality even further.

³⁰ <http://www.whartonjournal.com/2.10095/another-look-at-japan-enlightened-capitalism-1.1453653?pagereq=1>

³¹

<http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/asiapcf/03/16/japan.cultural.order/index.html>

While, in general, the world's response was overwhelmingly supportive with aid and rescue teams reaching Japan within days and even hours, a disturbing question, perhaps premature, keeps appearing in the media coverage: Can Japan's economy survive this tragedy? Will it not set it back for years, if not decades?

Japan is not new to disasters and subsequent recoveries. Japan is not new to dealing with nuclear catastrophes either. As one of the tsunami survivors stated after returning to the devastated area where his home used to be, Japan will get through this challenge and again rebuild "from scratch." Not only will Japan rebuild, Japan will improve and innovate, turning the disaster into a springboard to new successes, as in the most recent example with Toyota. I believe most see it this way, as well, and have confidence in Japan; so, perhaps, in some way, I am preaching to the choir.

What perhaps is less clear to many people is the extent of the aid, which Japan is now in need. As the spotlight of media begins to dim and events in the Middle East already top the news again, it can be easy to assume that Japan's disaster is under control and the recovery underway. Japan's spirit is strong and its people are resilient, tempered by frequent earthquakes and aided by technological sophistication on the one hand, and deep cultural principles on the other. Nonetheless, often without showing outward signs of distress, the strong and patient hurt, too.

Now, is the time when Japan needs the world's help the most. As is generally the case in such situations: they need financial support. Totals from the Center for Philanthropy show that the donations given to Japan by Americans during the first week

after the disaster (\$66 million) are pale in comparison to the amounts given to Haiti (\$296 million) after last year's earthquake and to the relief efforts after Hurricane Katrina (\$547 million).³² Everyone's help counts and even \$100 per person will make a difference. In some strange way, we are in debt to Japan. Lessons, which are being learned from the Fukushima's nuclear catastrophe, are already being scrutinized by experts around the world and will likely help prevent future catastrophes in the US and other countries.

The monster tsunami that struck Japan on March 11th helps us put things in perspective in our own lives. The financial tsunami of 2008, while economically devastating, did virtually no physical harm. Many people lost their houses, but they kept their families. Houses that were lost, in actuality, are still standing, and will again be used by people who can afford them. Unemployment increased, but unemployment benefits are plentiful, with food, water, and shelter available to those in the most need. Luckily, we don't need to worry about the invisible nuclear enemy attacking us through the very air we breathe and water we drink. An old Chinese adage says, a "person's toothache is of more concern to him than a flood that killed a million people." Perhaps it is true that "to each it's own;" but as we are recovering from the aftermath of the financial tsunami, it is worthwhile to pause for a minute to acknowledge how much worse things can actually get and appreciate what we have. My heart and prayers go out to the people of Japan and their unwavering spirit. ▪

³² <http://www.kirotv.com/news/27249335/detail.html>



ANATOMY OF CHANGE

March 2012

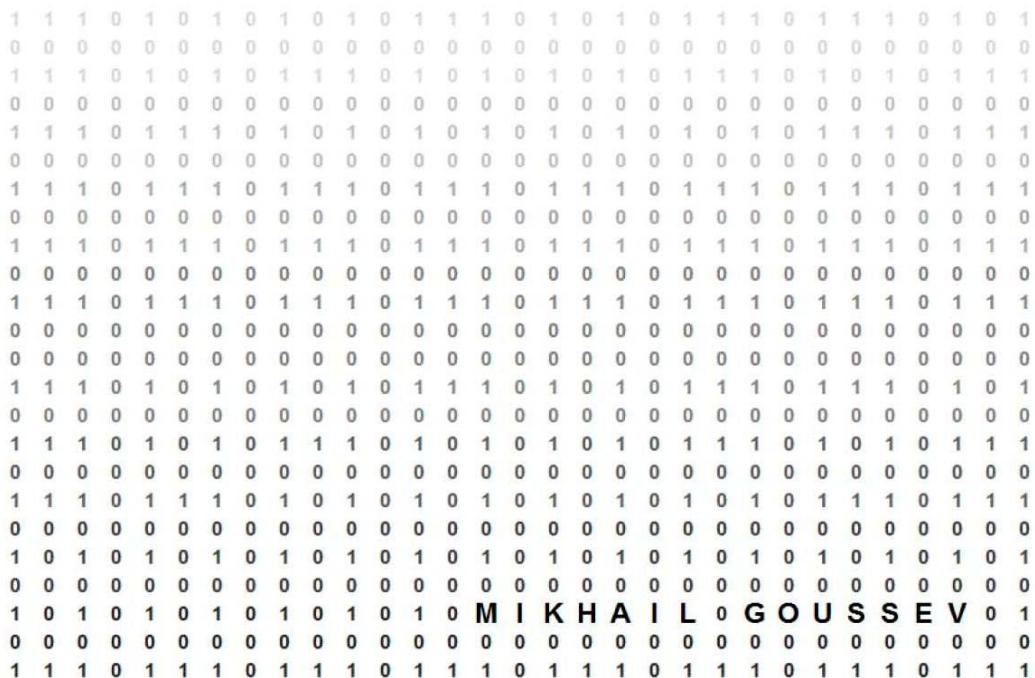
This collection of essays would not be complete without mentioning my biggest writing project to-date: the book *Anatomy of Change*, which took a number of years to complete before its publication in early 2012. I am presenting here a Preface section to the book in its entirety.

“Everything in the universe, from human relationships to high energy particle interactions, is participating in a ceaseless process of change guided by simple, yet universal patterns. From the beginning of philosophical thought in ancient China, nearly 4000 years ago, through current research in physics and molecular biology, one basic question is being posed: *How do phenomena change?*” (Phillips, 1992) This book will explore one of the world’s oldest and perhaps the most universal system developed by mankind - the *I Ching*, or the ancient Chinese *Classic of Change* - to address this question in the context of human relationships and organizational dynamics.

I became captivated by the *I Ching* from the moment it came into my hands. It is hard to tell now, so many years later, what exactly attracted my attention first, but as time went on I continued to gain deeper and deeper appreciation of the total and beautifully balanced system that the *I Ching* is. The *I Ching* appeals to both mythical (from Greek *mythos*) and logical (from Greek *logos*) sides of our minds and existence. On the one hand, it’s a book, a collection of short stories related to typical situations in the lives of any person,

ANATOMY OF CHANGE

MILLENNIA OLD MODEL FOR NAVIGATING CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY



Left: Book cover, *Anatomy of Change*

organization, or society at large. The abstract language of the text of the *I Ching* speaks to the *mythos* side of our brains, helping us trigger associations and intuitive insights into whatever issue we may be confronted with. On the other hand, it is a mathematical model designed to reflect the dynamics of change with elegance and precision, which is truly surprising given its ancient origins. This model clearly appeals to the *logos* side of the brain. In the age of science and technology, the two sides, the *mythos* and the *logos*, are becoming increasingly polarized. The *mythos*, which is the mother of faith, often stands in contrast to the *logos*, the father of science. The *I Ching* is the only system I can think of that allows the two sides to come together and co-exist in a meaningful equilibrium.

Many books had been written on the *I Ching*, mostly presenting yet another translation or adaptation of its abstract text. This book is distinctive in the following respects:

- First, it puts emphasis on the *I Ching* as a system and framework, which correlates with modern knowledge and invites the critically minded audience to explore it and benefit from this system in a contemporary context.
- Second, it presents the results of my exploratory study with multiple participants illustrating the beneficial applications of the *I Ching* by people not previously familiar with it. The study includes quantitative ranking of the relevance of the consultations by the participants based on a subjective scale of 1-5 with the average ranking of 4.57.
- For the business minded audience, the book explores the parallels between the Porter Five Forces model (Porter, 1980), arguably the most established framework for industry competitive analysis taught in virtually all business schools in

the West, and the *I Ching* based model of organizational dynamics (Yi, 1995).

Let me further expand on the above points. Most books on the *I Ching* focus on the actual text, its *mythos* side, providing new versions of translations and interpretations of the underlying Chinese characters. This is fine, except that, when compared, the different translations of the *I Ching* differ greatly both in volume and content. The degree of interpretation and adaptation applied by different authors often makes it difficult to decide which source to use. It seems that one may never find out the meaning of the original text without learning Chinese. In fact, even a native Chinese speaker will find numerous versions of the text to choose from based on various traditions (e.g., Buddhist vs. Taoist, etc.). On the other hand, based on my experience using the *I Ching* over the years, I find that with practice, the length of text becomes less relevant. It is the composition of a hexagram coupled with a few key words from the related chapter that allows me to grasp and interpret its message, not a lengthy description of someone else's interpretation of the text. In fact, the literal translation of the *I Ching* reveals it to be written in a very symbolic, abstract and in some way cryptic language; it is not the polished, coherent sentences and paragraphs we expect in the English language. The *Anatomy of Change* addresses that issue by minimizing the text and reducing it to literally three pearls of wisdom for each chapter by using Brian Browne Walker's translation as the basis (Walker, 1992).

Few books explore the underlying structure of the *I Ching* with a level of detail sufficient to reveal its beauty and power. To be fair, this would not prevent users from deriving an immediate and tangible benefit from using the *I Ching*. Just as we don't need to understand how a car's engine works in order

to be able to derive the benefits of driving a car to get from point A to point B, we don't necessarily need to know the underlying theory of *Yin* and *Yang*, let alone the complexity of possible interactions between the underlying *Yin* and *Yang* forces that the *I Ching* hexagrams represent. However, if one wishes to go beyond the basic use and understand the "science" behind the change we see in our daily lives, the underlying structure of the *I Ching* may provide some key insights and warrant the time spent studying it. In this book, I've decided to put an emphasis on the *logos* side of the *I Ching*, its inner structure, which, in my opinion, opens up new possibilities for working with the oracle and understanding the nature of change. The name of this book, *The Anatomy of Change*, reflects this thought. The insights into the inner structure of the *I Ching* presented here are inspired by the Stephen Karcher's translation (2002) of the *I Ching* and Cyrille Javary's guide to the history and use of the ancient Chinese oracle (1997), but are also drawn from many other sources listed in the Bibliography.

Finally, most books focus on consulting the *I Ching* via traditional *chance* methods, i.e., deriving individual lines of a hexagram by flipping coins or using other similar methods. Since the reader has no influence on which hexagram will be ultimately created due to the random outcome of each toss of the coins, the main objective of a consultation is to interpret the meaning of the derived hexagram and its message in the context of the situation. While this approach turns out to be surprisingly effective and relevant even for the skeptics, it clearly skews the *I Ching* application towards its *mythos* aspect. The alternative is a lesser known approach for consulting the *I Ching* by constructing hexagrams as a result of the *deliberation* on the situation being analyzed similar to the way one would

assemble pieces of a puzzle. Such an approach puts emphasis on the *logos* aspect of the *I Ching* as it requires one to be fairly familiar with its inner structure. Let me further highlight the importance of the deliberate approaches for working with the *I Ching* by quoting one of the most prolific translators of the Asian classics, Thomas Cleary. In *I Ching Mandalas: A Program of Study for the Book of Changes* (1989), he says:

In my introduction to The Taoist *I Ching*, I cited several Chinese sources presenting a view of the *I Ching* that basically rejects the idea of the classic as an oracle. These arguments bear repeating, not because they are necessarily truer than any other but because the popularity of the view that the *I Ching* was and is an oracle is such that it is easy to take it for granted as true and thus to leave unexamined the possibility that the *I Ching* is not a mystery but a system, a system that can be seen whole and whose workings can be deliberately understood and applied.

The deliberate approach to analysis is more likely to appeal to the analytically minded audience as a tool for modeling the present and forecasting the future. In fact, I dedicated an entire chapter to the business applications of the *I Ching* based on my research. In summary, this book focuses primarily on working with the *I Ching* via the *deliberate* methods typically not found in other books on the *I Ching*. Throughout the book I will use the terms *deliberate* and *analytical* interchangeably.

Regardless of which side of the *I Ching* appeals to the reader most, *mythos* or *logos*, to get the full benefit of this ancient classic one must understand and appreciate both, since in real life *mythos* and *logos* must co-exist and complement each other. Just as we cannot ignore the effect of the laws of physics and material demands on our bodies, we cannot ignore the mysterious, at times, workings of our psyche on our very lives.



REFLECTIONS FROM THE WAY

is a collection of personal essays by Mikhail Goussev previously published in Wharton Journal, Qi Journal, A Journal of Russian Thought and other publications over the course of fifteen years.



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