

There is No Spoon

By Gabriel Ryder

I recently watched The Matrix for the first time since I received Tao and I was so struck by it that I felt compelled to write a kind of commentary based on my own experiences with the Tao practice. It was not the first time I had seen The Matrix. When it was originally released on video I watched it twice and decided it was a potentially powerful story, but a bad movie. However, after cultivating Tao for a couple of years and seeing it again, The Matrix really came to life for me. I want to comment on various points in the film that I find noteworthy.

Why is this happening to me?

This is the first question Neo asks himself after Morpheus contacts him and tells him what he needs to do to escape the Agents. I broke into laughter when I saw this because I know that feeling so well: “Why me? Why can’t I just live a normal life? Why can’t I just do the same things everyone else does without all these pestering consequences?” This is the point when Neo begins to realize that he has a mission whether he wants it or not and the Agents want to put a stop to it.



The Agents represent the energies that block us from finding our True Hearts – the center of our being that is in harmony with the universe. They are guardians of the Matrix. The Matrix represents karma: the pattern we are born into as a result of our past lives and the momentum of our ancestry and the society we live in.

You know that road. You know exactly where it ends.

Morpheus is a guide for Neo. He is there to introduce others to the truth just as we introduce others to Tao. Once Neo is contacted by Morpheus he is given a choice. He can choose to learn the truth or he can go back to his old life. When he is contacted again by students of Morpheus, his initial reaction is to run away, back to the old life, back to the pattern, until one of the students, Trinity, says to him “You know that road. You know exactly where it ends. And I don’t think that is where you want to be”.

The road she refers to is the predictable road carved out for us by our karma. It is a road with ups and downs that are repeated endlessly, and the scenery it provides is dull and uninspiring, yet hypnotically comforting. With this in mind, Neo realizes he is ready to try something different, even though he is fearful and uncertain of what it may come to. He decides to trust Morpheus’ students.

I don't like the idea that I'm not in control of my life.

When Neo meets Morpheus “face to face” for the first time, Morpheus asks Neo, “Do you believe in fate?” Neo says he does not. He believes that he is in control of his own life, but Morpheus knows that Neo is not in control of his own life at all. In fact, Neo’s life is only a construct of the Matrix. It is at this point that Morpheus offers Neo a choice. He can take a blue pill, which will send him right back to his old life, his Matrix life, or he can take a red pill which will awaken him from the Matrix, shake the pattern of his existence, and open his eyes to the truth.

In this way, taking the red pill is like receiving Tao. Our pattern is shaken up and we are given the opportunity to transcend our karmic cycle. Like Neo, we are given the opportunity to truly be inside our own bodies and use our real eyes for the first time. But, this is only the beginning. Neo, like us, still needs a lot of training.

**You think that's air you are breathing?**

While in combat training, Neo is challenged to fight a Kung Fu match against Morpheus. Neo demonstrates a high level of skill, but he is eventually overcome by Morpheus. Neo's weakness is not his technique. It is something deeper. Morpheus points out to Neo that they are loaded into a program, a digital world, and therefore their physical strength and speed are not what matter in this “Kung Fu” match. He is not training Neo's body, but his mind. Neo is exhausted from the fight and gasping for breath as this is being explained to him. Morpheus asks Neo if he thinks it is really air he is breathing. Of course it is not air that he is breathing, but a simulated experience.

This is very similar to the vivid and convincing sensations we experience in our dreams. In this sort of experience the ‘reality’ we perceive is no longer limited by physical laws. It is only limited by our minds. By mind, I do not refer only to the brain, but to what is called Xin, in Chinese – Heart/Mind. Everything comes from our hearts. This is true not only in our dreams, but in our waking lives as well.

For Neo, the training program and the Matrix are both worlds based on rules. However, by following the path of his mission, Neo learns that with a clear mind and clear heart he can transcend these laws. In our material lives we can do the same by breaking out of our patterns. If we are connected to our True Hearts, the very substance of our world can be transformed. This is similar to what is written in the Heart Sutra which says “Substance is emptiness and emptiness is substance”. When the momentum of our karma is too heavy, we are swept into negative patterns that continually lead us away from our True Hearts. This is why we need the guidance of Tao, so we can restore our spirits and regain that connection.

The Matrix cannot tell you who you are.

When Neo is loaded back into the Matrix after having taken the red pill, the Matrix world looks very different to him. It appears to him as familiar, yet unreal. He is startled by the realization that his entire life in the Matrix was not really his own. All of the memories of his life, his notions of reality, and his very identity were just part of a program. Had he not met Morpheus and chosen to take the red pill, he would have never known any better. Fortunately, there was a seed of truth in Neo’s consciousness that led him to Morpheus.

For us, the seed of truth is the seed of Tao – our True Heart. When we begin to cultivate Tao, our awareness is increased in such a way that we become uncomfortable in our old patterns. The world begins to look different to us. Our priorities begin to shift and our senses, both physical and spiritual, grow sharper. The illusions of everyday life become more transparent and the enticements of the material world no longer hold so much sway over us. This allows the seed of Tao to grow within us and we start to give more attention to our own spiritual development. If we cultivate Tao with sincerity, our true identity will grow out of the compost of our daily routine and our lives will brighten with clarity and purpose.

I can only show you the door. You’re the one who has to walk through it.

This is what Morpheus says to Neo when he takes him to visit the Oracle. The Matrix cannot tell Neo who he really is and neither can Morpheus. Even the Oracle cannot tell Neo who he really is.

Morpheus and the Oracle are only guides. Neo will only know his true self by following his mission. Every step Neo takes toward fulfilling his mission will reveal to him where his True Heart is.



This is also true in the Tao practice. To cultivate the seed of Tao within is to cultivate the true self. Through this self-cultivation we learn to connect with the universal Tao. When we connect with the universe in this way, we begin to know the nature of perfect harmony.

Most people are not ready to be unplugged.

In one of the training programs, Morpheus teaches Neo about the nature of their mission. Morpheus wants Neo to understand that the people in the Matrix are plugged into a program and that program has become reality for them just as it was for him. Neo cannot expect everyone to consent to being unplugged from it. Morpheus also explains to Neo that many people have become so dependent on the system they are plugged into that they will fight to protect it.

By helping people receive Tao we are helping them to unplug from a system of negative patterns, but most people are afraid to break their patterns and may resist making even the slightest changes in their lives. This is the nature of karma. It is important for us to understand that we are only guides. We cannot break someone else's pattern. We can only show them the door. There are many people who, like Neo, really want to cultivate the seed of Tao within, but do not have the resources do so. We can help them find the door, but it is up to them to decide if they want to walk through it or not.

Ignorance is bliss.

This is the conclusion that Cipher comes to when he decides to help the Agents capture Morpheus. Cipher is not interested in truth or liberating others from the Matrix. He is only interested in himself. Although he has the tools at his disposal to shatter the Matrix and bring about the potential for everyone to live a life of free will, he feels that it is not worth the sacrifice of his own personal comfort. He is tired of the struggle or "The Good Fight" as St. Paul calls it in the Bible. He no longer wants to follow Morpheus. He does not trust Morpheus, because Morpheus urges him to abandon his selfish interests and challenges him to become something greater.



At one point, we see Cipher at a dinner table in a fine restaurant cutting into a rare steak and washing it down with a glass of red wine. He is clearly making a deal with the Agents. He will help them capture Morpheus and in return he asks that they will load him back into the Matrix with a new Matrix-life of wealth and fame and no memory of Morpheus or life outside of the Matrix. The Agents are willing to grant his request without hesitation, because they know that wealth and fame and the Matrix are only illusions. To Cipher, this illusion is more meaningful than truth. Ignorance is bliss.

The more we cultivate Tao the more clearly we see through the veil of ignorance that blurs our true vision. We begin to look deeply into the nature of vanity and selfishness and it becomes only natural for us to abandon such delusion and help others to do so as well. The bliss that Cipher seeks is false and temporary. Giving-in to selfish impulse only leads to a life of loneliness and bitter disappointment. We need to understand and cultivate our connection with other people, the earth, and the universe as a whole. This is the nature of Tao.

This can't just be coincidence

Once Morpheus is captured, Neo's mission starts to become more apparent. The Oracle's prophecy comes to fruition and Neo's faith begins to grow. His faith hinges solely on one idea; that he can save Morpheus. It is an idea that defies all logic and yet he cannot shake the feeling that it is, for him, attainable somehow. Neo senses that the Oracle's prediction about Morpheus' fate and his own feeling that he can alter this fate are more than mere coincidence. He begins to perceive a kind of order and purpose underlying these events. At this point, Neo is no longer relying on the directives of Morpheus and the Oracle. He is following his True Heart. His motivation to carry out his mission is coming from within. Morpheus and the Oracle have watered the seeds of self-knowledge in Neo and now these seeds are starting to blossom and bring about action.



The difference between knowing the path and walking the path

Once Neo's actions begin to emerge from his internal nature he starts to demonstrate abilities that would have otherwise been unimaginable. He is able to alter and defy the laws of the world around him. We see a transformation in Neo that takes him from the realm of the limited into the realm of the limitless. He seems to have tapped into a great, inexhaustible resource. It then becomes possible for all of Neo's actions and thoughts to become an extension of this resource. But, it is only after he has acted out of his own true will that he can connect in this way. Morpheus told him "I am trying to free your mind". The Oracle told him to "Know thy self". But, it was the direct experience of "walking the path" that led Neo to this great transformation.

What we can learn from Neo is that faith grows out of our actions and further actions grow out of our faith. Everything starts from within, but it is how we live our lives, how we act in the everyday world that will determine whether we connect with our True Hearts or become just another blip in The Matrix.

Note: One of my favorite parts in the movie is when Neo arrives at the home of the Oracle and notices a boy bending a spoon using the power of his mind. He warns Neo that to try to bend the spoon is impossible. He further explains that "It is not the spoon you are trying to bend; it is only yourself".

It is our hearts that must change and then the world around us will be transformed.

