

My Journey to the West

By Jessica Farley

In June of 2004, I moved from Virginia to California to enter a graduate program for Oriental Medicine and explore unknown shores of possibility. It was an abrupt move, though I had been considering studying Chinese Medicine for almost a year. I am now studying at an extraordinary school and becoming stronger as I expand myself and realize my purpose.

I never expected to find myself here. However, I am glad to say that the journey has been far greater than I imagined. It has also been one of the most challenging experiences of my life. There were many reasons why I did not want to move to California. First and foremost, I preferred to stay in Virginia where I had become comfortable with my Tao teachers and community. If I had not been blessed by the advice of others I would probably still be in Virginia working a mediocre job and waiting for something different to happen.

"Action may not always bring happiness; but there is no happiness without action." - Benjamin Disraeli



My teacher and friend, Young, offered great guidance and wisdom to help me break through my excuses and have the courage to move forward. He made me aware of the opportunity in the balance and directed me towards expediency even before I visited my prospective schools. He told me to move as soon as possible and not to wait for months on end, as I desired. He emphasized the obvious fact that I could not stay in Virginia forever! I was scared. I wanted to take things slowly, stay in Virginia for the summer and possibly until autumn. I now know that hesitation would have served only my fears and not my desire for growth. If I had not listened to someone with perspective more clear, I would have wasted time and let it slip away. My idea of studying Oriental Medicine might have remained a mere concept that never had a chance to manifest itself in reality. I might have simply talked about it for months or years without action, as many people do. However, the Tao practice has taught me that you cannot just talk; you have to do something. Words and intention are nothing without the action to complete them.

If you are cultivating Tao, the likelihood is quite high that the chance to achieve your goals and fulfill your purpose will arise. Tao and change go hand in hand. It is easy to be content with the dream of who you are and what your life is or will be. It is challenging to work to pursue it. It was hard for me to imagine taking such a risky step and leaving my life in Virginia behind.

My Tao family was a refuge of protection and wisdom that I did not want to lose. My own karma held me back and I was terrified of change. I had a nice job, a car, and possibilities for a new roommate and a good living situation - a comfortable situation - but that is not what I needed to grow. I needed to be stretched and learn independence.

Nothing has been so great a test and trial for me as moving here to California. It was lonely, hasty, and required more energy than I thought I had. Even so, I knew that I needed to forge my way, and the tools of the Tao practice allowed me to do so.

"The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." - Marcel Proust

It is important to acknowledge that I did not have these tools a year and a half before I moved to California, before I received Tao and began cultivating. At the time I was just finishing college and I wanted to travel far away - to run away. I had always fantasized of leaving my problems behind. The end of my academic program seemed the perfect excuse. Nothing held me to the DC area: it was painful to be near my family. I was depressed, sick, and generally miserable. But when I Received Tao that I knew I would remain in the DC area. I moved to Virginia be closer to my Tao family and teachers; in doing so, I put myself in a position to achieve greater clarity and discover my true heart. A year after my graduation I did move to California, but my life was incredibly different. I was not running away. I did not even want to go. I went because I was determined to grow and learn how to better help others.

If I had left right after college, as I had planned, I would never have made it. I did not have the right mindset, motivation, or tools to succeed. I would have remained lost. Traveling to a new state would have only meant a fresh background for the same painful patterns and emotions that made me want to run away in the first place. I needed the tools of the Tao practice and energy of Heaven to make this new endeavor worthwhile, possible, and fruitful.

Among the tools that proved useful were the beginnings of discipline and commitment that I had learned in Virginia. I fastidiously followed-up on leads for housing and jobs, and finished my applications for school. I tried to conserve my energy and use it to help my dream materialize. I used the Heart Sutra when I found myself lost and vulnerable to the chaos of Venice Beach, where I lived for my first three months on the West Coast.

"Every obstacle in his journey became a milestone, an occasion for further triumph." - Nikos Katzenzakis

There were so many distractions in California, new and dissonant energies, and people interested in all manner of spiritual practices, ritual, and energy work; it seemed such an immense cacophony. But, I did not give up! I kept myself relatively clear by using the Heart Sutra on a daily basis and not paying attention to the disharmony surrounding me. The temples in Los Angeles were few and often inaccessible. I did not have the luxury to simply go to a temple and get clear. That refuge was no longer so available. I had to find other ways to manage myself in order to avoid becoming lazy or overwhelmed; this challenge helped fuel my inner strength and connection to the tools that were accessible.

I learned that it is critical to know how to not pay attention to the karma and diverse energies surrounding. You have to hold fast in the storm and not be swept away. You have to stay on the right path and avoid the distractions that bring you further from yourself and your goals. I still struggle with this and often fail in my efforts. I work to conserve my energy and discern and not got to unhealthy places that I know will drain me. I endeavor to remain focused on my actions and purpose- not my emotions, excessive thoughts and feelings. It has been crucial to be mindful and know that what I do matters even when it seems small. If I let myself become worn out it will impact my life as a whole and the lives of others whom I have the opportunity to touch.

"At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person." - Albert Schweitzer

Another tool I relied upon within the whirlwind of arriving to California was the advice and wisdom of my teachers and community. I did not try to figure everything out alone. I called them when I was confused and did not know what step to take. I know how privileged I am to have a resource of people who can help me regain lucidity. Although my persistence and focus were and still remain invaluable, I could never have done it by myself.



The community of Tao practitioners supported me with its energy and continues to do so as I struggle through this new and dynamic experience. Without teachers I would have lacked wisdom and discipline. Without a community I would not have had the strength. Without the support of the Heaven I would have been too overwhelmed. Without Receiving Tao I would have not had the inspiration. Without a commitment to progressing in my life I would not have the results.

Finally, I want to note what a difference it made to use the time before my relocation to offer friends, family, and co-workers the chance to Receive Tao. I did not want to squander my last few weeks and have things left undone. This action produced more energy for the work that was cut out for me on the West Coast and also helped quell my family karma so I could leave without a fight.

By the time I arrived in California I began to realize what almost no one does until they move on: our opportunities will not last forever, and we are not entitled to them at any time we want. The resources of today may not be there tomorrow. These resources include the following: constant access to my teacher and Tao community as well as my friends, the presence of a temple, and the support of people who are clear minded and working with discipline to find their true hearts and help others.

When I was in Virginia there were times and chances to progress that I wasted because I was not focused and did not fully appreciate what was available to me. I know that my friends and family also missed out on much-needed energy and guidance that I could not offer because I was wrapped up in distraction, fear, or a sense of entitlement that allowed me to move too slowly.

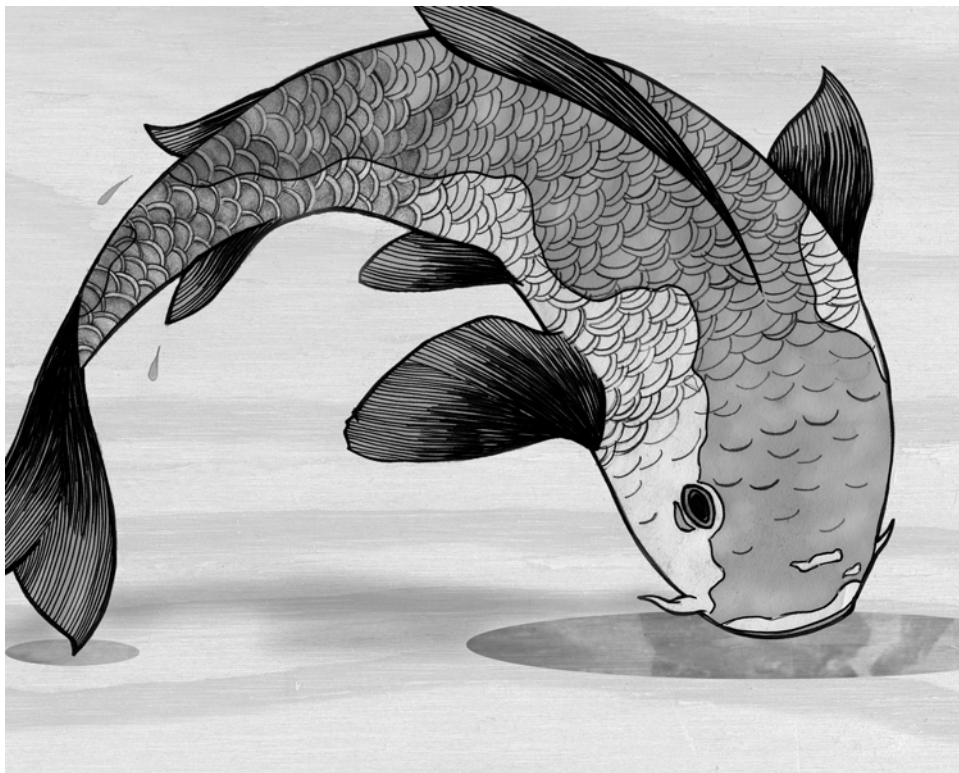
It is easy to move through life without clarity and to think the opportunities that arise will always be at our fingertips; however, this is not true and we are foolish to think it is.

I am thankful that I appreciated and took advantage of such riches to the extent that I did. Heaven gives us the chance, but it is our responsibility to take it and recognize that it is time to grow; this is so true for me now as I live out this possibility here in California. I discovered that I have to pay attention to timing and not take things for granted. I need to respond to opportunities with action and gratitude. This is a truth I will probably have to realize again and again, because it is so easy to become clouded and forget! However, I will keep working and using the tools I have found incredibly valuable and effective in order to remember who I am, achieve what I have started, nourish my faith and commitment and continue succeeding as my journey continues.

Things have not become easy in the many months that I have lived in California. I hold onto my moments of wisdom, during which I realize that my challenges are a small fraction of time in the grand scheme. I work hard because I want to cultivate myself.

The Tao Te Ching says "people always fail when they are on the verge of success, take as much care for the end of things as for the beginning, then there will be no failure;" This statement guides me with each struggle And I know that great difficulties may be the door to new knowledge and strength. I know that what I do has an impact that extends beyond my own life: it will affect my family, my karma and my friends.

At a school for Oriental Medicine I am surrounded by people who know about Qi (energy), study Taoist philosophies, and want to help people. I have come to appreciate them; I want to give them the opportunity to experience the heavenly grace and transformation I have had through Tao. Even though there are lonely times that make me just want to go back to Virginia, I am incredibly grateful for the energy and support that allowed me to take on this endeavor. I also know that if I did not truly appreciate it in my heart, I would be unable to thrive in this new context. If I took the tools, light and grace for granted I would lose my own direction. So, I offer the deepest of thanks from my heart.



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