

Tao and Psychology II

By Chad Carpenter

HYPER-INTENTION

Hyper Intention can also be defined as *you wei* (action) or the opposite of *wu wei* (non-action). When one places pleasure-seeking as the goal in one's mind, one is setting him/herself up for immediate failure. Happiness and pleasure are not to be attained, but are by-products of correct intention or purpose.

Hyper-Intention is striving too hard for some kind of personal gain. Psychiatrist and neurologist Viktor Frankl used the analogy of sleep to express this point. We all have nights when we have trouble sleeping. Whenever we *try* to fall asleep, we cannot- we just lie awake in frustration. After repeated efforts, we eventually accept that we will not fall asleep, and we give up trying. Once we do this, what happens next? Usually we fall asleep immediately. This is why people count sheep to fall asleep, even if they do not understand the mechanism behind it. Counting sheep puts our concentration outside of ourselves and our need to fall asleep.

In other words, focusing attention away from our personal needs is helpful. When we can take it a step further and focus our thoughts on the needs of others, it ultimately enhances our own personal situation. The mere fact that an individual focuses on the needs of others alleviates anxiety about their personal situation. It also creates room for personal reward without their asking or looking for it. When we try to do something, for some reason we cannot be successful. We try over and over, but we just cannot get there. And when we cannot do it, our focus on that intent becomes even stronger, building our frustration. In the case of sleeping, the frustration itself becomes a force preventing us from sleeping- again feeding that vicious cycle. But what happens when we are not concerned about sleeping? Usually we have no trouble sleeping at all. The opposite can also hold true- trying to stay awake can cause extreme drowsiness.

A friend of mine told me a story about how he and his wife had decided to have a baby, but when they tried to conceive, they met with repeated failure. This occurred for several years, and eventually they became so frustrated by their inability to conceive that their relationship began to deteriorate. They accused each other for their failure, but inwardly they also accused themselves. After some time, the couple realized that they would never conceive and they came to accept their misfortune. They decided that not having a baby was simply their fate. Once they accepted this notion, they stopped trying to have a baby and even thinking about it. When they reached this point, their relationship quickly improved and relaxed so greatly that they became content and happy with each other's company again. A few weeks later, they conceived a baby. They now have a beautiful daughter.

WILL THE REAL *WU WEI* PLEASE STAND UP

The paradox here is that we can, to a certain extent, control our environment by not controlling it. "Tao does nothing, yet nothing is left undone", right? This is *wu wei*. So, you might think to yourself, "I can control my environment if I use the principle of *wu wei*". Well, no. By trying to use the principles of *wu wei*, we would be doing the opposite. We would actually be performing the function of *you wei* (action). It is the very act of trying that causes the problem here. It is a kind of forced *wu wei*, and a forced *wu wei* cannot be the true *wu wei*. It can only be *you wei*, or hyper-intention.

People often become confused about the definition of *wu wei* being non-action. They may misunderstand this to mean "do-nothing". I have a translation of the Tao Te Ching by John C.H. Wu in which he translates *wu wei* as "ado" rather than "non-action". I think this might be a more accurate translation, because "ado" means to make a fuss. One can engage in action without "making a fuss", and it is *wu wei*. It is an action born out of naturalness: something done without

any thought given to it. It is purely spontaneous.

A movie called "The Tao of Steve" illustrates these principles. It is a comedy about a guy who twists the philosophies of Lao Tzu and others into a "foolproof" theory of dating. By trying to use the principles or "rules" of *wu wei*, he claims he can get any girl he wants. Essentially, he tries to be appealing to woman by pretending that he is not trying to be appealing. This is a superficial *wu wei* because it is a method. A method is not *wu wei* it is actually *you wei*. Because Steve acts superficially, he is only capable of forming superficial relationships. However, things change for him when he falls in love and finds that his method no longer works. The girl he falls for is impervious to his methodic and superficial approaches. She is more real and natural than any of the other girls he has been with. Steve learns that if he wants something that is real and natural, then he must be real and natural himself. Thus, he is forced to abandon his methods, and by doing so he also abandons his false self. This enables his true self to begin to emerge. As Steve's actions become more natural (by going from *you wei* to *wu wei*), he is able to get what he really wants.

This relates to what Frankl called "self-transcendence". The true self is self-transcendent because it projects its thoughts outside of itself, and onto other people or ideas greater than itself. The true self is never self-centered.

The search and discovery of the true self is not always easy. It often involves much suffering to get to that point. The false self (the ego) does not want to give itself up that easily. The death of the false self can often be a very painful thing, but it is the only path to finding the true self.

THE TRUE SELF

Frankl says that "The search for meaning often creates tension within the individual rather than equilibrium". This may make some of us wonder whether the search is really in our best interest since it may (more often than not) cause tension and discomfort rather than peace. However, it is this "tension" that also acts as the very process for attaining self-actualization.

It is much like the analogy of the diamond. Coal, or carbon, over millions of years is put under tremendous pressure until the end product is a diamond. What started out as a common, abundant, and fairly useless material is transformed into a priceless one. But the coal cannot just transform itself into a diamond simply by choosing to be a diamond. The conditions have to be right. The coal must endure pressure (tension) for an extended amount of time. The pressure/tension is the very process of transformation.

We should never look at the tensions or problems in our own lives as unfair, unwanted or unneeded. We should try to view them as opportunities to better ourselves. This is because we can only attain Tao through the transcendence of self and suffering. All change requires tension. Change cannot occur without it. If everything were in a perfect state of equilibrium, life would cease to exist. It is the choices we make during the states of tension and suffering that are of the utmost importance. These very choices "make or break" us.

The True-Self



TENSION OF YIN AND YANG ENERGY

We discover that hardship and difficulties (or tensions) are not really the problem. The real problem is that we think they are real, so we develop an attachment to them. We do not understand that hardships, like good fortune, are just clouds in the sky. Each one gives way to the other, and back again. The whole world and everything in it is playing this back and forth game. Everything is vibrating with this energy. It is *yin/yang*, on/off, up/down, etc. All vibration is composed of waves, and all waves are made of crests and troughs. Have you ever seen a wave that is all crest or all trough? No, of course not. This is because they do not exist. If a wave had crest and no trough, it would not be a wave at all. It would be flat line, and a flat line has no life. Life is also composed of these ups and downs. To have a life with all ups and no downs is impossible. Everything is inextricably tied to its opposite. You cannot have day without night, life without death, or up without down.



When we become attached to the illusions of fortune and misfortune, we ride the crests and troughs of the wave with our minds. Our lives become like a rollercoaster. When things are going well, we feel that it is a permanent state and we become elated. When things are going badly, we also think it is permanent so we become depressed. Up and down, up and down. But when we are able to see the whole picture (the entire elephant), we can step back and see that the wave movements are a metaphor for the patterns in our lives. Things become easier, because we understand that all things are temporary and will change. The only "thing" that is not vibrating with this wave-like energy (duality) is *wu chi*, or the original self. It is the true self. When we find our true selves, we no longer ride this rollercoaster. We can be at peace. And when we are at peace we have come to the end of suffering.
