

Timeless parables of Eastern wisdom for the Western world

# The Tao of HAPPINESS

STORIES FROM CHUANG TZU FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY



莊子之道

DEREK LIN

AUTHOR OF *THE TAO OF DAILY LIFE*



JEREMY P. TARCHER/PENGUIN  
An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC  
375 Hudson Street  
New York, New York 10014



Copyright © 2015 by Derek Lin

Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

Most Tarcher/Penguin books are available at special quantity discounts for bulk purchase for sales promotions, premiums, fund-raising, and educational needs. Special books or book excerpts also can be created to fit specific needs. For details, write: [SpecialMarkets@penguinrandomhouse.com](mailto:SpecialMarkets@penguinrandomhouse.com).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lin, Derek. 1964—author.

The Tao of happiness : stories from Chuang Tzu for your spiritual journey / Derek Lin.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-698-19860-9

1. Tao. 2. Taoism. 3. Spiritual life—Taoism. 4. Zhuangzi. I. Title.

B127.T3L56 2015

299.5'1482—dc23

2015024087

Cover design by David Walker

Version\_1

# *Contents*

[\*Title Page\*](#)  
[\*Copyright\*](#)  
[\*Introduction\*](#)

[\*\*PART 1\*\*](#)  
[\*Departure\*](#)

[The Flight of the Peng Bird](#)

[The Frog in the Well](#)

[Useful and Useless](#)

[Secret Formula](#)

[\*\*PART 2\*\*](#)  
[\*Travel Advisories\*](#)

[Chaotic Currents](#)

[The Mantis Hunts the Cicada](#)

[The Sacrificial Cow](#)

[The Horse Lover](#)

[PART 3](#)  
[\*Travel Tips\*](#)

[The Happiness of the Fish](#)

[The Chef Cuts the Ox](#)

[The Wheelmaker](#)

[Huangdi and the Boy](#)

[The Tao of the Bandit](#)

[PART 4](#)  
[\*Arrival\*](#)

[The Death of Chuang Tzu's Wife](#)

[The Death of Chuang Tzu's Friend](#)

[The Death of Chuang Tzu](#)

[Tears of Fears](#)

The Dream of the Butterfly

*Farewell*  
*About the Author*

## Introduction

# 莊子之道

If you have not encountered Chuang Tzu before, you are in for a treat. He was the sage who stood apart from all others in Chinese history. He was a unique presence, a great mind like no one before or since.

If you have encountered Chuang Tzu before in other books, you may find that this book offers a different approach by focusing on his stories, rather than on historical footnotes or scholarly citations. In Chinese culture, Chuang Tzu is not an academic subject to be analyzed but a source of inspiration and insight.

The name “Chuang Tzu” (“Zhuangzi” in the Pinyin system) means Master Chuang. His full name was Chuang Chou (Zhuang Zhou), and he lived about twenty-four hundred years ago, during the Warring States period. It was a time of death and destruction due to widespread warfare. It was also a time when many schools of philosophy emerged, perhaps as a response to the extreme chaos.

Chuang Tzu quickly distinguished himself and became well known for his deep understanding and sense of humor. His mastery was such that he could explain the Tao with simple stories. His humor was such that he could see the joy in ordinary things. He taught his students about “carefree wandering”—the path of moving through life with a free and happy heart, regardless of how turbulent the journey might be. He regarded this as the Tao of true happiness.

His teachings were collected in the classic known as *Nan Hua Ching* (*Nan Hua Jing*), and it had a tremendous impact on Chinese culture. Many common

sayings and expressions in modern Mandarin trace directly back to it. The concepts and ideas within its pages are actively studied and appreciated today. As long as Chinese culture lives, the legacy of Chuang Tzu will also endure.

It is time for us to join in on the fun. Chuang Tzu's wisdom is not just for the Chinese, but for all humanity. We may not have the instability or the clash of massive armies in the Warring States period, but we definitely have a lot of stress and tension in these modern times. Many of us find ourselves fighting little battles on the personal front just to get through the day. We can definitely benefit greatly from Chuang Tzu's teachings.

The best way for us to learn also happens to be the easiest. Chuang Tzu loved to teach through stories. The tales he crafted drew his students in, captured their imagination, and conveyed the Tao in unforgettable ways.

As you take in the stories, you will see that Chuang Tzu had a unique perspective on just about everything. He rejected conventional concepts. He took numerous notions to a level beyond the mundane to reveal how different things looked in the Tao. When people mourned the death of a loved one, he showed them that it made more sense to celebrate a life well lived. When philosophers talked about living with no particular goals or traveling with no particular destinations, he described the spiritual journey as the sacred quest for the Tao\*—a journey full of meaning, undertaken with definite direction and purpose.

This spiritual journey is exactly what we will delve into with this book. It is the great truth behind Chuang Tzu's idea of carefree wandering. It is also his ultimate teaching, where the process of learning about the journey is a journey in its own right.

So . . . what is the nature of Chuang Tzu's spiritual journey, and how do we prepare for it? What are the challenges along the way? How do we get the most out of the trip? What happens when we get to the destination? Let us begin by asking these questions . . . and let the stories of Chuang Tzu bring us the best answers.

PART 1

---

*Departure*



*Before we embark* on the spiritual journey, we should take some time to contemplate the journey itself. Tao sages always know what they are getting into and never rush into anything blindly. Let us emulate them by understanding the nature of the journey and mentally preparing ourselves:

1. Chuang Tzu likens the spiritual journey to the long flight of a giant bird high in the sky. This flight can be seen as the lifelong path of Tao cultivation, the quest of learning and exploration, and the sacred task that you are in this world to accomplish.
2. Be ready for the mind-expanding effect of the Tao. The teachings of Chuang Tzu will show you a whole new world and open up your spiritual dimensions dramatically. Once you are immersed in this vast ocean of wisdom, you will not be able to go back to the more limited perspective.
3. There may be those who denigrate your efforts as useless. When dealing with such people, hold on to the thought that your path is unique, just as you are unique. Nothing is absolutely useless in the Tao, and your journey will prove to be supremely useful, for it will enable you to change your world. This change is a gift that only you can bring.

4. The outcome of your journey will, to a large degree, depend on how you use the Tao. Some will use it only for philosophical discussions or playing with ideas, but you must go far beyond that level. Use the Tao to do great work and propel yourself to go the distance. The Tao is unlimited—do not limit yourself when you tap into it.

# The Flight of the Peng Bird

---

鵬程萬里

*In the Northern Sea, there is a giant fish. Its name is Kun. Its size is incredibly large. No one knows how many thousands of miles its length measures.*

*The Kun fish is able to transform into a bird, known as Peng. The Peng bird is also incredibly large. No one knows how many thousands of miles its wingspan measures.*

*When the Peng bird flies with all its might, its wings are like the clouds that hang from the sky. This massive bird migrates to the Southern Sea when great winds blow across the ocean. The Southern Sea, its destination, is also known as the Heavenly Pond.*

*An ancient chronicle of strange phenomena describes it this way: “When the Peng bird begins its flight to the Southern Sea, it splashes water from the surface of the ocean for thousands of miles. Its wings generate a hurricane force to lift it up to a height of ninety thousand miles. This occurs in the month of June, when the wind is at its strongest.”*

*When the Peng bird flies, it can be seen from afar. This is similar to how one sees wild horses running and kicking up a cloud of dust from a distance. All living things move in accordance with nature, just as nature moves in accordance with all living things.*

*A cicada and a turtledove look up to see the Peng bird in the sky. They find the whole idea of the journey ludicrous. The turtledove laughs in mockery: "I fly with all my strength and stop when I get to a tree. Sometimes I can't even make it that far so I drop to the ground. Why would anyone bother flying ninety thousand miles to wherever?"*

*From the Peng bird's position beyond the clouds, it sees the true color of the sky and the unlimited expanse of heaven. When the Peng bird looks down, it sees everything below fading into the hazy distance. Lifted by powerful winds beneath its giant wings, the Peng bird pays no heed to ground-level chatter. It directs its attention to the horizon and continues its flight toward the Southern Sea.*

## The Tao



In the Chinese-speaking parts of the world, “*peng cheng wan li*” is the most frequently used expression in graduation ceremonies. It is the equivalent of “go forth” in the West, and its meaning is similar: May you go far in life, live up to your potential, and achieve great things.

*Peng cheng wan li* can be roughly translated as “the giant Peng bird travels ten thousand miles.” It is a direct reference to this story, where the flight of the Peng bird is the metaphor for a journey of great achievement. Chuang Tzu’s original purpose in writing this story was not to inspire high school or university graduates. He wrote it for everyone. The inspiration he expressed was intended for all human beings.

In life, you start out as the Kun fish. The great size of the Kun fish is the vast potential within you. You already possess all the power you need to become the Peng bird, but that power has to be activated. Prior to the activation, your potential remains dormant, and you continue day after day in the cold depths of the Northern Sea, swimming around and not really getting anywhere.

To activate or awaken the power within, you must answer the calling for something greater than yourself. In the story, the calling manifests as the great winds blowing across the ocean. You respond to such a calling by making a definite decision to commit yourself. This commitment may be to a cause you believe in, or a personal goal to do your best in contributing more to the world. Whatever the specifics may be, your decision is what triggers the transformation. You become the Peng bird, rising quickly out of the depths, shooting up to the clouds and beyond. Nothing can stop you.

The meaning of the story is as clear as can be to the Chinese, but in the West it is not quite as clear. There may be Western students of the Tao who feel that having a goal or destination is not in keeping with the free-flowing nature of the Tao. Some may argue that goal-setting is a trap that leads to strain and strife. To them, the flight of the Peng bird is inconsistent with Chuang Tzu's concept of carefree wandering.

To clear up this misunderstanding, we only need to realize that being carefree does not preclude having a goal or destination. The reverse is also true—having a goal or destination does not prevent you from feeling carefree. This is because carefree wandering does not mean aimless wandering. In fact, knowing where you are going and how to get there will do wonders to remove any uncertainty and anxiety from your mind. This lets you relax and enjoy the process of getting there. Having clarity on your goal or destination is what makes the carefree state of mind possible.

You may know people who already have this kind of clarity in life. If so, observe how they speak with confidence and take actions with definite purpose. They exude happiness because they've been liberated from the pain of an empty and meaningless existence. They radiate joy because they can see themselves getting closer to the fulfillment of their dreams. Is it any surprise that these are the people who "go forth" feeling absolutely carefree?

You can be at that level too. You can embody both the Peng bird and the carefree wandering in the recognition that there is no contradiction between the two. It all starts with knowing the purpose to which you must commit yourself. If you already know your mission in life, this part requires only a simple decision to proceed. If you do not yet feel that level of certainty, set for yourself the goal of lifelong cultivation until something more definite comes along. Either way, everything will start falling into place as you transform from the Kun to the Peng for the long flight. This marks the beginning of your spiritual journey, your own path on the Tao of Happiness.

You may encounter naysayers as you make your preparations. They don't have any ideas of their own, but that won't stop them from commenting that your ideas won't work. They may know very little about you or your spiritual interests, but that won't stop them from expressing disdain or disapproval. Like the cicada

*image  
not  
available*

## The Frog in the Well

---

### 井底之蛙

*Once upon a time in ancient China, there was a frog who lived in an abandoned well. He considered himself the master of his domain and felt quite satisfied with it.*

*One day, he saw a sea turtle moving slowly nearby. He felt like some conversation to liven up an otherwise boring day, so he called out a greeting. The sea turtle approached to return the greeting. Upon seeing the frog's smug expression, he said, "You seem happy. That is good."*

*"Happy? Of course I am happy!" The frog smiled proudly. "Look at my life! Whenever I want, I can hop around the outside of this well. When I feel tired, I can go inside the well to rest. Sometimes I enjoy the water, so I go soaking in it. Sometimes I enjoy the mud, so I run my feet through it." He pointed at the smaller creatures in the well. "See the tadpoles and the others? They cannot compare to me. I know more than they do. I enjoy life more than they can imagine. This well is my territory, and I own the water. This is as good as it gets!"*

*The sea turtle did not respond, but the frog was in a generous mood, so he offered: "Why don't you come into the well and take a look? I want you to see for yourself."*