

The Five Excellences

by Stephen Russell a.k.a. The Barefoot Doctor

I'm not sure if it was because unconsciously I'd remembered this being one of the three choices this week but recently I was looking back on my life to date and thinking about how as a young man I'd chosen to base my path of personal, creative and professional development as the master I was aspiring to be one day, on the Taoist concept of the 'five excellences' and how this had more or less worked out so far in a fairly satisfactory, indeed occasionally extremely exciting and unexpected way and that for this reason I could more or less comfortably continue to promote the schema as one worthy of dedicating your life to.

And it goes like this.

If you can attain mastery in meditation, you will preserve your sanity and peace of mind even and especially in the midst of pressure and stress.

If you can attain mastery in medicine – this could apply to any valid form of healing, including the very subtle discreet ability to heal the ambience of the atmospherics wherever you are – you will be able to help others preserve their own sanity and peace of mind.

If you can attain mastery of martial arts, you will be able to protect yourself and others from violence, as well as maintain optimal fitness and vitality levels.

If you can attain mastery of compositional skills, in terms of creative expression through any of the arts – visual, sonic, performance, literary etc – you will have a sense of purpose and stand a good chance of bringing the unique gift of your self to bear on the world.

If you can attain mastery in presentation skills, in terms of the ability to bring your gift to market, as in making it as widely available and accessible as possible, you will feel fulfilled in your purpose for having made a contribution to the general well-being of humankind.

You will also, with a little ingenuity and perseverance, be able to make a living by means of any or all of the five, as you progress in your development in each, though this should not be your primary motivation, in the same way as learning self-defence should not be your primary motivation in learning tai chi, even though by mastering tai chi you have at your disposal the most effective boxing style and self-defence system known to humankind, hence its name, which in full means, 'supreme ultimate boxing style'. If you take up the path of the five excellences for the sake of achieving mastery and through that to be of more service to humankind, earning a living out of it will come of itself if needs be without much or any effort on your part making it happen.

In other words, embark on the five excellences to be excellent in all ways and your life will be excellent as a result. Embark on the five excellences to make a living and you merely add to the mediocrity and tedium of life seen through a mundane prism.

The five excellences comprise nothing short in fact of the key to enlightenment and, according to us Taoists, wayward or traditional, spiritual immortality itself, so not to be confused with something as prosaic as a career option – a calling maybe but not career option.

In following the Tao, you don't do things for effect, you do them because they're up for being done at the time they present themselves and you, following the Tao and investing in loss (of preferences – see last week's column), just happen to be the one to do them and while doing them, are hopefully enjoying rather than resisting doing them and sharing your joy with everyone you meet and know as love, expressed to each in the appropriate way.

Someone who can attain mastery in only one of the excellences is considered remarkable.

Someone who can attain mastery in all five is beyond remarkable and remarkably well-rounded as an individual to boot. However, if you balance your time wisely between them, all five become mutually synergistically supportive and beneficial, hence the Barefoot style is to gradually make a little more progress every day in each of the five areas of endeavour – nothing too dramatic in any

one area – slowly, slowly finding progressively greater facility in each, always bearing in mind, that mastery itself is an illusion. You may appear masterly to others but within, you know that however well you're performing, there's always an eternity's worth of distance still to go in terms of learning, experience and understanding in all respects.

So you have to be patient and compassionate with yourself.

The five excellences is a training template – (indeed if I ever actually get round to properly establishing my cherished School for Warriors, the five excellences will form the template of the system) – a template for the training that goes on for the whole of your life, so in effect you are always a student. In that way, life itself becomes your university and seen from this perspective, everything that happens to you, whether apparently good or apparently bad (at the time), is merely more useful grist for the self-educational mill.

In terms of using it practically in your life without having to turn everything upside down and start again – in a way you can usefully integrate into a busy schedule, allow me to present a highly simplistic example of how this may work.

Excellence Number One: Meditation Skill:-

Every day at some point, spend some time meditating in the fashion described in most of my DocBoxes (see Resource Base)– relaxing the muscles, broadening and lengthening the mainframe, breathing freely, sinking the chi into the belly, softening the chest to allow the love to flow, drawing your mind back away from your forebrain and all the internal chatter occurring there, into the central brain region instead and simply gazing into the void, allowing yourself to fall backwards through inner space until you feel caught in the arms of the Tao and then just hanging there in peace for a while.

[You can refine that by 'scoopin' the loop', which is described in detail in Handbook for the Urban Warrior (soon to be an only-available-here e-book as well) and then even further by enacting the entire Taoist inner alchemical process, as described in full in Return of the Urban Warrior. In fact, now I come to mention it, I've written an entire book about the five excellences and how to train in them successfully – Handbook for Heroes, (which may become an e-book too if there's any interest) but which I'd strongly recommend having a gander at, if this five excellences idea grabs your interest and you want a more in-depth exposition.]

Excellence Number Two: Medicine Skill:-

Meantime, back on the ground, every day, you make sure you do at least one act of service in a healing, or making whole, capacity. This could be to lend someone an ear (but really listen when they talk), it could be as simple as smiling with eye-to-eye contact at someone working in a shop just to acknowledge the miracle of their presence in what may otherwise be a dehumanising role, it could be as relatively complex as laying your hands on someone and channelling chi to heal them of physical or emotional pain, indeed, should you be trained in some form of medicine or healing, it may be something far more involved altogether. The key is to be sure to do some sort of healing, discreet or overt, every day. And if you feel any calling at all to train in some form of healing or medicine, don't resist it.

Excellence Number Three: Martial Arts Skill:-

Learn a martial art – I'd recommend one of the Taoist internal styles – tai chi, hsing I, pa kua or possibly white crane – but I'm biased and as long as you're happy with the style – karate, wing chung, tae kwondo or whatever - it really doesn't matter which you choose providing there's scope, as with tai chi, to continue practicing for the rest of your life, because it does require a lifetime's practice to get quite good at it.

If you already know one or more martial arts, be sure to maintain a daily practice regime and be disciplined about it.

If you don't have any interest whatsoever in learning a martial art, don't be disheartened, as you could with a little imagination substitute any form of psycho-physical discipline that requires lifetime training, such as yoga, dance or whatever. These may not be so effective in terms of self-defence but the most important aspect of martial arts training is the opportunity it affords the student to get to know themselves body, mind and spirit, a little more each day.

Excellence Number Four: Compositional Skills:-

Everyone is gifted with the facility for at least one form of creative self-expression and usually more. Spend some time each day – it could be merely a few minutes, slowly patiently progressing your creative output, by doing something towards it – it could be something you write, it could be a blog on the site for instance, it could be something you draw, paint, photograph, dance, film, or play (on an instrument, including computers or record decks for instance) – not seeking perfection or ultimate results, just happy to be doing a little more each day.

Excellence Number Five: Presentation Skills:-

Make one move every day to actively bring your creative expression to a state where others can enjoy it too – doing a blog on the site here, would be the perfect example but it could be making a scary phonecall just for the hell of it, to some publisher or other, to a TV station or whoever, even if it's just to collect a refusal. The result doesn't matter as long as you enjoy the process itself and that's the point, to enjoy the process of putting yourself 'out there', not in spite of the fear that provokes but because of it. By jumping over your fear in this way, you become invincible.

So there, in a nutshell and a half is everything I can think of to say that might be of use with respect the five excellences. As I say, if you want to explore further, have a look at Handbook for Heroes.

But for now, let me leave you with a wish that you now access your innate excellence and express it easily and effortlessly, creatively and magnificently in all that you, think, say and do – and may the results of that be exhilarating for everyone.

Love, Doc xx