

Bearing Up – or Why I want to be more Bear

Opening music = https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4lI80_QpUI

The Cuckoo in the Depths of the Woods from Camille Saint-Saëns *Carnival of the Animals*.

Opening words

Welcome

Welcome to all, however you are and whoever you are. Whether you are joining us in person or through the magic of technology. Welcome if you are here in need of company and reassurance, if you are in pain or struggling at this time. I hope you will find some solace and understanding as we come together to connect, sing and pray.

I invite those of you online to light a candle now as I light our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith.

Lighting of the chalice

"Let there be light!" Let it shine in dark places, in moments of pain, in times of grief, in the darkness of hatred, violence, oppression, where there is discouragement and despair. Wherever darkness is to be put to flight, "Let there be light!"

Words written by Unitarian Universalist minister Gordon Butler McKeeman

Service introduction

Today's service is entitled: **Bearing up – Why I want to be more Bear.**

The first part – Bearing up - refers to my recent work life. The past couple years my work has been extremely busy and procedures have changed at short notice which has made my role different and more difficult.

Perhaps this resonates with some of you – maybe you have also found sudden changes to life hard over the past couple of years or are finding it hard to stay joyful in light of personal circumstances or the various problems facing the world currently.

The changes I have experienced came to have a major impact on my enjoyment in and out of work as I have felt frustrated and insignificant.

However - the past month my outlook has been changing for the better!

The changed procedures at work have not improved but my mood is positively transforming.

Inspiration came to me in the form of a well-known bear and this is why rather than bearing up - I want to be more bear.

You may see some residents of The Hundred Acre wood have joined us today with copies of their well-loved stories. □ You may therefore have guessed the Bear who helped change my perspective. You could say he has shown me *the Way*.

Last month I finally read my long-ago-purchased copy of Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh* explaining how Winnie the Pooh demonstrates the principles of Taoism (Dow-ism).

One of the key works of Taoism is the *Tao Te Ching* (DAO DEH JEENG) a collection of 81 verses on the nature of existence allegedly written by Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu (LAO-za).

Lao-Tzu (LAO-za) called what he saw as operating behind everything in heaven and earth *Tao* (DAO) – commonly translated into English as “*the Way*”.

Let us now sing about *the Way* with our first hymn as the words were inspired by the *Tao Te Ching* (DAO DEH JEENG).

Hymn 1: Purple book: 142

Shining through the universe

Thank you for singing □

I now would like to invite Chris up to the lectern to read today's story.

Story: The Stonecutter

There was once a stonecutter who was dissatisfied with himself and with his position in life. One day he passed a wealthy merchant's house. Through the open gateway, he saw many fine possessions and important visitors. “How powerful that merchant must be!” thought the stonecutter. He became very envious and wished that he could be like the merchant.

To his great surprise, he suddenly became the merchant, enjoying more luxuries and power than he had ever imagined, but envied and detested by those less wealthy than himself. Soon a high official passed by, carried in a sedan chair, accompanied by attendants and escorted by soldiers beating gongs. Everyone, no matter how wealthy, had to bow low before the procession. “How powerful that official is!” he thought. “I wish that I could be a high official!”

Then he became the high official, carried everywhere in his embroidered sedan chair, feared and hated by the people all around. It was a hot summer day, so the official felt very uncomfortable in the sticky sedan chair. He looked up at the sun. It shone proudly in the sky, unaffected by his presence. “How powerful the sun is!” he thought. “I wish that I could be the sun!”

Then he became the sun, shining fiercely down on everyone, scorching the fields, cursed by the farmers and laborers. But a huge black cloud moved between him and the earth, so that his light could no longer shine on everything below. “How powerful that storm cloud is!” he thought. “I wish that I could be a cloud!”

Then he became the cloud, flooding the fields and villages, shouted at by everyone. But soon he found that he was being pushed away by some great force, and realized that it was the wind. “How powerful it is!” he thought. “I wish that I could be the wind!”

Then he became the wind, blowing tiles off the roofs of houses, uprooting trees, feared and hated by all below him. But after a while, he ran up against something that would not move, no matter how forcefully he blew against it – a huge, towering rock. “How powerful that rock is!” he thought. “I wish that I could be a rock!”

Then he became the rock, more powerful than anything else on earth. But as he stood there, he heard the sound of a hammer pounding a chisel into the hard surface, and felt himself being changed. “What could be more powerful than I, the rock?” he thought.

He looked down and saw far below him the figure of a stonecutter.

Thanks for reading Chris – much appreciated.

The philosopher Lao-Tzu (LAO-za) wrote that the earth is governed by the same laws as heaven. These laws affect all existence – from the spinning planets, the birds in the trees, fish in the sea and insects in the grass. Human beings included! We all play our part as everything in the universe is understood to be connected.

Lao-Tzu (LAO-za) believed that harmony is not achieved when we interfere or fight against the natural balance or way of things. With imbalance and disharmony there is fighting, inequality, dissatisfaction and hatred.

One important way of playing our part and living in harmony with *the Way* of the universe is knowing and respecting our own Inner Nature.

Like the Stonecutter in the story – there may be desirable abilities or lifestyles we covet for ourselves. But being untrue to ourselves won't give us the power or harmony that we seek in life. We can learn certain skills to develop our abilities but we must recognise what is already there.

According to the *Tao Te Ching* (DAO DEH JEENG) we all have a remarkable latent power lying within us but it only emerges when we are aware and aligned with the natural way of things and our Inner Nature. Perhaps you have experienced this for yourself when trying something for the first time – you seem to have a natural affinity for whatever it is.

When we know and respect our Inner Nature then we know where we belong and what our limitations or weaknesses are.

If we desire to be anything other than who we are, like the Stonecutter, we run the risk of never being satisfied, living at odds to our Inner Nature.

Our limitations can actually be our strengths though – by knowing what they are then we can work with them rather than having them work against us.

Lao-Tzu (LAO-za) believed that intuitive knowledge was the purest form of information. When you are going with the flow of *the Way* you gain the ability to do things spontaneously and just have them work which can appear odd or likened to 'a fluke' to others. This is Effortless Action and Pooh Bear is a master of it.

Pooh shows an intuitive sensitivity to the natural order of things. He works **with** the circumstances he finds himself in, even those that could be considered bad or difficult and things appear to just work out – I will give a couple examples:

- In chapter 3 of *The House in Pooh Corner* the animals are looking for Rabbit's missing friends-and-relations Small Little Beetle and Pooh Bear finds them but only after tumbling into a pit.
- In chapter 8 of *Winnie the Pooh*, Pooh Bear rescues Roo who has fallen into the river. Whilst the other animals and Christopher Robin are desperately and unsuccessfully trying to work out what to do Pooh Bear is already calmly downstream ready to rescue Roo with a long pole, he 'just found'.

It sounds magic but I am confident we have all had these sorts of moments - when things just 'click'- perhaps you view such moments as fate, providence or plain luck. I certainly would like work procedures to be less complicated and more effortless! But how?

Now - there are many other examples in both books that show how Pooh Bear is the embodiment of some of Taoism's key principles. Besides Effortless Action there is Natural Simplicity and Spontaneity. There is certainly nothing pretentious about Pooh Bear – he is very genuine and straightforward. That is clear from his interactions with his friends. And Pooh is **very** spontaneous – much like a child. He will burst into song or go off on an adventure for no reason other than fun. I am sure we all could do with spontaneous fun. I know I feel good after an impulsive sing-song.

Taking a leaf out of Pooh's book I have been thinking that perhaps on our upcoming week off my husband and I could go out on a spontaneous adventure with no set destination or plan. It could be a fun experiment of sorts.

The books also illustrate how we can get into bother if we are not aware or in touch with our Inner Nature.

Tigger comes to mind as in chapter 4 of *The House at Pooh Corner* he is boastful about his abilities – he claims that Tiggers can do anything and that climbing is what they do best...not quite, a page or so on and Tigger and Roo are stuck up a tall pine tree.

Verse 63 in the *Tao Te Ching* (DAO DEH JEENG) recommends that to follow *the Way* when we are faced with a problem, we should go with the flow just as a river finds its way through a valley of boulders. By working our way around areas of resistance with small, non-confrontive actions energy can then be directed to achieve our aims without interfering with the natural cycle of events.

I wondered how I could apply this to my situation. I am quite an emotional and sensitive person and this can be my strength if I let it rather than a limitation.

In relation to my disharmony with work procedures, I can certainly see how focusing on the negative effects of our procedures has been akin to water trying to go through the boulder.

BUT!

If I turn my limitation into my strength I could focus my energy - guided by my passion for wellbeing in the workplace and good customer service – so that my frustration could be transformed into enthusiasm to help and support. Rather than trying to change the procedures head-on I could go around the areas of resistance by working with improvement groups to advance positive change.

It sounds simple – but when life gets busy or difficult, we often get out of step with our Inner Nature don't we? We can't see the wood for the trees and Effortless Action seems like a romantic dream.

The important thing to achieve this is taking some time away from everything other than yourself and *the Way* – 3 or 5 minutes for yourself to check-in. Maybe do a body-scan or take some deep breaths but the key is to not let your mind distract you.

Such a small amount of time say 3 minutes can give your body, mind and spirit the opportunity and space it needs to recalibrate our senses so we can reconnect with our Inner Nature and the Universe.

We can experience this when going to sleep or waking up. It happens when your senses are not distracted and your mind has emptied. Suddenly an idea or answer appears out of nowhere and instantly everything is so clear.

In Taoism it is understood that within us all there is a being who, like Pooh, is a master of Effortless Action, Spontaneous Fun and Natural Simplicity.

Now with our busy modern lives it may be hard to hear the voice or recognise our powerful Inner Nature as we go about our day but if we dedicate time and space to listen to it - it may just show us *the Way*.

Let's sing again – this time...

Hymn 2: Purple book: 21

Come and find the quiet centre

I will share a prayer in a moment - after which there will be a time for personal reflection – initially in silence then with accompanying music.

Throughout the prayer there are three pauses for us in which to take a deep in and out breath – the words will guide you when these are.

A Prayer for Difficult Times by UU Rev. Sylvia Stocker

In the quiet, let us gather our hearts, many hearts beating, many people dreaming, many souls yearning for peace, for freedom from worry, for assurance of a brighter tomorrow.

We gather in difficult times.
Growing numbers of people unemployed, hungry, afraid.
Growing numbers of people living under the shadow of war and violence.
We gather in difficult times.

Here, in the quiet of our assembly, here in shared warmth and compassion, just for this moment, may we feel free of our burdens. May we breathe in together, gathering in peace. And may we breathe out together, letting go of worry and fear.

(Breathe...)

Just for this moment, may we feel quietness of heart. May we breathe in together, gathering in gentleness. May we breathe out together, letting go of frustration and anger.

(Breathe...)

Just for this moment, may we feel held in a community of loving souls. May we breathe in together, gathering in support and caring. May we breathe out together, letting go of loneliness and isolation.

(Breathe...)

Just for this moment, may we sit together, one community of peaceful, quiet, loving souls, buoyed by our shared strength and spirits. Just for this moment, may we know in our hearts that we are not alone.

May it be so.

****Start music after 45 seconds-60 seconds of silence****

Music to accompany a time of silent reflection/prayer =

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5maN2L8ooxM>

***A Song of Simplicity* by Elijah Bossenbroek from their album *Harmony of Disarray*.**

In addition to Effortless Action, Natural Simplicity and Spontaneity, Taoism (DAO-ism) also recognises Compassion as essential for living in harmony with *the Way* of the Universe.

Now Pooh is a very kind and thoughtful bear but there is another famous literary bear who I think - thanks to his personal journey - will always be a symbol of compassion and tolerance.

Arrival of bear ☐

Paddington here usually sits on my work-desk at home.

I imagine most of you are familiar with Paddington Bear's story.

If not, Paddington Bear arrives a young bear on his own at Paddington Station with nothing but a suitcase, a half-empty jar of marmalade and a label that reads, "Please look after this bear. Thank you." He gets taken in by the Brown family and after some hilarious mishaps Paddington becomes part of the family.

For over 6 decades Paddington's story has taught readers the importance of compassion through the tale of a refugee bear from deepest darkest Peru.

His story is still sadly very relevant today as prejudice towards immigrants remains and the number of displaced people seeking refuge continues to grow around the world.

Like Pooh Bear, Paddington is a bear I would like to be more like too. He has a small ego but a huge heart. He always looks for the good in everyone, even when he is faced with meanness or daunting challenges. Perhaps you have a literary Bear who inspires you – maybe it is Pooh or Paddington or perhaps Rupert or lorek (Yoh-rek) Byrnison.

Let us now sing of compassion in our final hymn – the words may say human and race but I am sure it is a typo and it meant to be beings and species. All deserve kindness.

Hymn 3: Green book: 125 One Human Commonwealth

Thank you for listening today.

I'll end the service in a moment with a benediction inspired by the **Serenity Prayer**.

Today's closing music and video will follow and it is one which always makes me smile – I encourage you to sing, sway or dance as you feel moved to do so as Baloo Bear sings *The Bare Necessities* from Disney's animated retelling of Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* stories.

After the video we will have our church notices and then all are welcome to chat on Zoom or in person in the hall.

Loving Spirit

Please grant us the grace to accept with serenity,
those things that cannot be changed,
and the courage to change the things which should be with kindness.
Bless us with the wisdom to recognise the one from the other.

Fill our hearts with joyful spontaneity,
as we strive to live one day at a time enjoying each moment,
whilst also recognising and accepting hardship as a pathway to peace.
Let us take the world as it is,
Not as we would have it,
Trusting that all will be well,
If we follow *the Way* of the universe – living simply, effortlessly and with compassion for all.

Blessed Be.

Blow out the chalice.

End music/video = <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08NlhjpVFsU>

The Bare Necessities from Walt Disney's adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* stories.