

Rites of fall

We have a lot of trees in our backyard, and my work schedule does not give me enough time to appreciate nature's fireworks. Somehow I found a rake in my hands and my wife gracefully suggesting that it was time to rake and bag the leaves. We do it the old fashioned way ... by hand.

Every year I cannot fail to think that this was the job my children used to do. They did it in the only way young people know how. They were not working. They were playing. I can still see my daughter attacking her brother, fighting on the ground, as the leaves were flying, performing a dance of celebration. Eventually they went back to their raking and bagging all those leaves.

For many years I did not consider leaf raking a high priority job. This year it was different for me. A client sent me a few books to read. One of them reminded me of ideas I read in the past. But for some reason this time the words and the concept registered in my mind.

“Whatever you do, just be aware of what you are doing”, the author explained as he was discussing some concepts of Taoism. The reason we are not enjoying life is because, as we perform our daily tasks, we do not think about what we are doing.

Our mind begins to chase ideas. We become totally absorbed by our thinking, forgetting how we got there. Meanwhile, the task at hand has lost all our interest and suddenly becomes boring. On the other hand, if you are aware of what you are doing, you become totally absorbed by your action and appreciate its meaning, and life becomes fun. This is what Tao is all about.

With the rake still in my hand, I went to the backyard. My mind focused on the task at hand. The rake was touching each leaf. I saw each leaf slowly fly and join the others. The mound gradually increased. The time went by very quickly as I kept my awareness of what I was doing.

I thoroughly relaxed as I became deeply aware of the rites of fall, with the trees still aggressively adorned by various shades of yellow, red, and brown.

My wife smiled. I was finally doing what I once resisted. I saw my children laughing as they said “It's your turn, dad.”

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