The Man Who Drove With His Eyes Closed



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The Man Who Drove With His Eyes Closed



STEPHEN RUSSELL
(the BAREFOOT DOCTOR)

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To all my teachers.

And special thanks to my dear friend and brother on the path, Danny Buckler, who encouraged me to write this book.

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Foreword

I'll be frank. There's something I don't get. I'm just back from a two-day trip to Legoland with the family, where we must have spent about £500 altogether. £500 on burgers and chips, entry into a series of long queues, bits of coloured plastic arranged into various shapes. Don't get me wrong: I loved the experience. But I now sit with this tome in my hands, retailing at £8.99.

£8.99 is what they were charging for a mug with the photo of your screaming family dropping from the top of the rollercoaster.

£8.99 is what it cost to order a club sandwich in the hotel once we got back with our collection of family-plastered mugs.

And here I am, now, holding a text with a retail price of £8.99 that contains more wisdom (and transmitted in such an entertaining manner) than I've come across in a long time.

I just don't get it.

But this question of 'value' is interesting, and pertinent to this great book. Barefoot recounts his experiences with so many powerful teachers, in an era long before you could do yoga in your local gym, tai chi in the church

hall or find alternative health advice on the shelves of WH Smith. It was an era when you had to go in search of knowledge beyond your high street. You can feel the pioneer spirit of Barefoot and his teachers on every page of this book: people on the very edge of learning about themselves and their place in the universe. It's clear that if you manage to find the one person in the land who can teach you the internal martial of Hsing I, then you're going to value that knowledge and regard it as the gold that it is.

And Barefoot came across lots of 'gold' on his journey to becoming the Barefoot Doctor in 1989. The stories are fascinating. But I expected that. Barefoot is such a good storyteller, and such a generous and perceptive observer of people that I knew I'd be entertained. What I didn't expect was that he would unpack his slowly accumulated knowledge so thoroughly and effectively.

The effect is a book that looks, on the face of it, like an autobiography (or, rather, multi-biography) but presents wisdoms of every colour on every page. Through this format, Barefoot seems to have deconstructed his own guru wisdom in a way that is both uniquely accessible and entertaining.

And it seems to me an act of great generosity to download this accumulated wisdom in such a way.

Especially at £8.99 a copy.

So back to this value point.

It's tempting to long for the pioneer days once more: when the supply of knowledge was limited and relatively inaccessible, when you had to fight for what you learned and treated the resultant knowledge with respect and 'valued' it highly.

But I for one am happy to live now in an age of instantly accessible wisdom: when you can access 1,000 gurus from your own desk or armchair. The trick now is to select the real wisdom and to give it the value it deserves. This is no easy matter.

Peculiarly, this over-supply in the wisdom market makes it as hard to find the gold as it was before.

And, in this context, we can still be pioneers: making our own personal way through the sea of mystery, trying to locate the bits that ring true for us.

Personally, when it comes to wisdom available in text format, I read a huge amount, then settle on just a few works, by a few authors. And I give them the highest value. I read them again and again, taking in every word until those words are part of me.

I've done that with the work of Barefoot over the years.

His work is gold.

And this work is the shiniest, most exquisite example of gold you'll find.

Thank your lucky stars that its monetary value is a mere £8.99 and treat it like the gold it is . . . treasure it, and let its power and beauty begin to adorn your life.

John C. Parkin, author of
F**k It: The Ultimate Spiritual Way
and The Way of F**k It.

Introduction

I'm a supercharged Taoist.

And that's a crazy way to start a book.

I do so because no doubt I'm partly crazy but also to grab your attention. I have a story to tell, and I believe it could be inspiring for you. I tend to suffer from compulsive liberationist tendencies – in other words, I'm a natural-born liberator – so I hope reading this book serves to set you free of anything holding you back from transforming your own life into the most magnificent adventure imaginable.

I say I'm a supercharged Taoist because for more than 35 years I've been training in Taoist martial arts, chi gung, and meditation. Just as it promised in the instruction leaflets, these practices have generated an accumulation of supercharged energy that courses through me and everything I do. This makes my life exciting, endlessly varied, and full of adventure. Using the ancient Taoist *wu-wei* manifesting methods – focusing on being, not doing, and intending things into existence rather than trying to force them – I'm able to create reality as I wish it to be, almost instantaneously. I say this humbly. Also, by letting the Taoist philosophy underscore everything

I think, do, and say, I've learned to be flexible in my thinking. Flexibility lets me enjoy all aspects of the ride to the fullest, whether in an up phase or a down one. I feel blessed by all this and want to share my good fortune with you. I want you, in your own style, to be blessed in the same way.

I've always had a desire to share the wonder of the Tao with others. That's been my motivation for as long as I can remember. I have an enthusiasm for it, a childlike exuberance that carries me through life in a way that uplifts and cheers me. I've found that over the years my exuberance has helped others feel exuberant too. That is how I want this book to leave you feeling, and I want all of Britain and the whole world beyond to feel exuberant too.

In order to paint a clear picture of what I do, I'm never really sure where to start, so I'll start here for now and see how it goes: I'm a writer (which is how the two of us got into this pickle in the first place). I'm a communicator. I'm a healer. I'm a public speaker. I'm a martial arts and meditation teacher. I'm a coach. I'm a workshop leader. I'm a philosopher. I'm a broadcaster. I'm a music producer. I'm a DJ. I'm a website content provider. I make TV programmes. I'm even a perfumer.

Physically speaking, though, I spend a lot of time interacting with circuitry and chips, tapping my fingertips onto small squares of sprung plastic on a keyboard – up and down and a bit to the side for hours and hours almost

every day. When not doing that, I'm sometimes pressing smaller plastic squares and talking into other bits of plastic. When not doing that, I'm rhythmically pressing, plucking or strumming steel strings; tickling the ivories; or slapping drum skins. When not doing *that,* I stretch and flex my vocal chords to make sound come out of my mouth into microphones on stands. Amid this tapping, plucking, tickling and all, I move my person and various bits of clothing through time and space and keep myself clean, fresh and nourished; and can regularly be found waving my arms in the air slowly or fast. Often when I'm doing much of this, I'm walking or sitting – sometimes with my eyes closed – on floors or in chairs of various descriptions, and in a multitude of diverse settings: in the air, on the ocean waves, but mostly on dry land. And generally there are lots of other people involved in what I'm doing, directly or indirectly.

Existentially speaking, I'm constantly exploring new, creative and innovative ways of transmitting not just the message of the Tao, but the love that informs it, to as many people as possible. And while I'm doing it, I have as much fun, with as much human warmth and colour included, with as many people as I can.

My desire is to encourage the whole world to relax a few degrees more. I believe this simple alteration is all that's required to enable us to communicate more freely, honestly and intelligently with each other; and in that communication find the way to live in peace and plenty

on this glorious planet of ours for many generations to come.

It seems clear enough to me that when we humans (all the way from grass roots to leadership level) are more relaxed, we tend to rise less quickly to anger and are more willing to talk sense with one another. We're more likely to negotiate from a place of fairness rather than one of greed, and to honor each other's differences rather than use them as cause for suspicion. It seems blatantly clear to me that the more we relax, the more lubricated the wheels of our global society will be, and so peace and plenty will be facilitated by and for all of us.

As we all can see, the need for this is becoming increasingly more urgent in the face of the unprecedented, multilevelled survival crisis we now face. This desire for global relaxation causes me to travel all over the planet on a fairly consistent basis: writing, filming, recording music, giving talks, holding workshops, arranging musical events, working on creative collaborations, meeting with business people and working on all other means of getting the love – and its supercharged energy – out there.

I'm blessed to have the practical tools to help make all this a reality for people. The Taoist system I practise is possibly the most comprehensive and practical method of relaxation, energy production and mental-sharpening skills in the world today. I've spent most of my life living, breathing, eating and sleeping it; practising every day and

teaching others how to do so too. And it works.

But I wouldn't want to force the Tao down anyone's throat. I appreciate that it's not for everyone, this way of the Taoist 'warrior'. It appeals to the maverick, the rebel, the individualist, the person who isn't willing to succumb to all the pretensions, lies and obfuscation of the everyday world. It's for those who seek the truth in all situations and want to feel authentic, relaxed, loving and beautiful in the midst of it all – connected to the spiritual source, yet fully engaged in the world, with its muck and mess, as much as with its miracles.

I grew up with a natural mystical tendency. I learned aikido at 11, became a hippie at 13, was drawn to Eastern-flavored philosophy, and got into yoga and tai chi in my late teens. In my early 20s I studied what I can only inadequately describe as life wisdom and consciousness with British psychiatrist R. D. Laing. When I lived in New Mexico in my mid- to late 20s, I studied acupuncture, Chinese medicine, Taoism and shamanism; and taught tai chi. In 1983, I started a healing practice in London, taught workshops and participated in experimental music events. I was, as far as I know, the first person in the UK (at a gig in London in 1985) and possibly the USA (at a gig in Greenwich Village the same year) ever to get large groups, sometimes with thousands of people, drumming together. It started off that whole tribal-drumming-for-enlightenment thing they use in corporate bonding sessions now. I taught tai chi and baby massage and kept

the healing practice going up until 2000. After that, I got full-time into promoting the message through the media, making music, writing books, creating body products and coming up with all sorts of other offerings to spread the love.

In 1989, I started calling myself The Barefoot Doctor and inadvertently became a brand and someone with a profile as well, doing my level best to remain a regular person – or perhaps I should say an irregular one. Because although I have met real characters in my time and have hung out with mavericks of the highest order, eccentrics of the nuttiest variety, artists of the greatest originality and masters (and mistresses) of the most supreme wisdom and enlightenment, I've rarely met anyone with a life as varied, bizarre, unlikely – and as far as I'm concerned – as fulfilling and fun as my own.

And none of it would have happened or be happening now had I not been blessed to encounter such an unusual array of teachers.

Rather than being a self-centred biography, this book is an account of my interaction with those startling teachers and how they taught me to be the master of my own life. It's my sincere hope that my accounts of them serve to inspire you equally on your own path.

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