



The Chronicles of Yen Tzu

Letting Go

'The value of letting go cannot be estimated,' began Yen Tzu, 'as its opposite of having attachment is detrimental to achievement and success. Let me illustrate with two tales:

'Hermit Wei glimpsed three eagles soaring above him. Calling them down to him he requested of the first: 'How much to carry me across the plains to the neighbouring state, please?'

'It's a two day flight at least and you are a heavy load,' replied the first eagle, 'I would like ten fish, a goat and a flagon of soya milk.'

'So much,' said Hermit Wei, and turning to the second eagle asked, 'What will you do it for?'

'It is right you are a heavy load,' answered the second eagle, 'yet as I am due to go in that direction in any case, I would want five fish, a kid-goat and a flagon of rice-water. It is a long trip that will require sustenance.'

Asking the third eagle what the charge would be, the hermit was surprised to hear: 'Five fish and a litre of water.'

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'What kind of fool answer is that?' Wei shouted. 'Why do you possibly ask for an amount that will not even sustain you for the trip?'

'I needed the order,' said the crestfallen eagle.

'The message is clear in this tale: When you compromise your worth you compromise the value of both you and your customer.'



'Now let me share another:'

'At last,' Tung Kuo said to himself, 'with this latest commission how splendidly I will be able to live!' In orchestrating the negotiations for Master Tien to take over the Ch'ien Low business of Yueh he had excelled himself. All the work was done and he simply had to wait. In six months the Registrar of Yueh would ratify the deal with the Ruler's Seal.

As the time went by all he could think about day and night was how he would be able to fulfil all his desires. There were many luxuries he had decided on, he could settle all his debts and, more significantly, his status among his peers would be greatly raised.

'Why do you not work these past five months?' colleagues would ask. 'Has the deal you live for come off already?'

'It will any day now so my time is fully taken up in getting ready for when it does,' replied Tung Kuo excitedly.

'Why couldn't his family be so excited? Tung Kuo thought. His uncle had advised against becoming so attached to a future event – but could he not realise how important this was? 'But it is the security I have been desiring for so long,' he had argued.

'Your desire for security is good, but it will not come from attention to the future, it comes from attention to the present,' his uncle had replied. 'Beware of attaching your emotional energy to something in the future or you will become like a prisoner bound with the chains of anticipation. You have sent your desires out, now detach yourself from their outcome or the price of freedom may be costly to you.'

'Rather than let go Tung Kuo tied himself up in emotional knots as the time when he would hear news of the deal's conclusion drew nearer. He became increasingly impatient and irritated with everyone he spoke to and had no time to think about anything else. Family, colleagues and creditors getting on with their own daily functions, kept out of his way.



'Receiving a letter from Master Tien close to the appointed day, he excitedly tore it open. The message was to inform that due to the sudden assassination of their Ruler by the men of Yueh, it was not possible for the registrar to ratify the sale of Ch'ien Low's estate. Indeed, the letter added, both the Registrar and Seal had been removed from office.

'Tung Kuo never fully recovered from the stroke that he had instantly suffered on reading the letter. It was some time later that his family were able to inform him about the further news received the very same day. Master Tien had omitted to say in his first letter that as both Ch'ien Low and he still wanted to proceed, albeit recognising it would have to be much later, he would still pay commission. An alliance had been agreed with a much lower price so, whenever Tung Kuo wished to present himself at The House of Tien, he would receive payment.

'Getting wound up because you feel the need to attain certain symbols, whether in the form of titles, status or money, makes you the slave of your desires rather than the master of them. Think about what it is you currently desire. The level of your emotional attachment to its outcome will be indicated by how frustrated you feel by it not happening yet, and how much you feel compelled to force, or think about forcing, a solution.

'Your desire to improve your lifestyle, indicates your innate power to be able to bring it into your life. But an emotional attachment to whatever it is you desire will immediately and significantly diminish this power and allow all manner of debilitating emotions to gnaw away at you.

'Letting go of an outcome does not require you to compromise your values or objectives and, moreover, will ultimately bring to you what you want.'

'Whenever you are about to say something and a distraction in the conversation causes you to forget whatever it was, experience tells you that the act of forgetting it brings it back. What you want to impart to another may be on the tip of your tongue, but the more you refuse to let it go, the more elusive it becomes. It is the act of letting go that allows you to recall it. If it comes to you much later, rather than earlier, it is because it took you longer to relinquish it.'

'It comes to you because your attention is occupied with something that is relevant to the present moment. In creating a garden you would not consider pulling up recently planted flower seeds to see if they are growing, yet the tendency with the seeds of desire is to become emotionally attached to them. In doing so you are placing your attention on a specific result in the future. In order to manifest whatever it is you want in your life, you have to be able to let go of your emotional attachment to the outcome.'

'And there is a final story on the subject I want to share. It is about letting go of your conditioned self, which is a false one and freeing your true potential, which springs from the real you: The great eagle, its huge wings covering its craggy mountain eyrie, was not immediately aware of losing one of her young as she tried to protect them from the fierce storm. The mother hen in the farm below was similarly unaware that something had dropped into the soft hay of her coup.'

'Reared to behave as a chicken, the young eagle never learned to fly, completely unaware that his nature was to be a king among birds. A passing hermit noticed him awkwardly holding his great wings while strutting and pecking with the other chickens.'

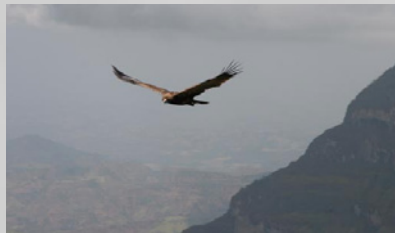


'Don't you know what you are?' said the hermit, gently taking the eagle in his arms. 'Your nature is to soar high in the sky. Come, stretch forth your wings and fly.'

'The hermit's action confused the eagle, however, as he did not know who he was he jumped down to rejoin the chickens. For several days the hermit persisted, each time taking the eagle to higher ground, saying: 'Know that although you may live like a chicken, inside you beats the heart of an eagle, a great eagle, know that you are the king of birds. Go, stretch forth your wings and fly.' But each time, the eagle appeared unaware of his true, unknown, self, and awkwardly hopped back to join the chickens scratching for corn in the dust. The hermit noticed, though, how the eagle would cast a few glances at the sky, almost as if sensing something stir deep within its heart.

'Finally the hermit carried the bird to the top of the mountain. Reaching a steep crag far above the chicken coup, the hermit held the bird aloft while repeating his words of encouragement: 'Out there, among the heavens is where you belong. Go now! Stretch forth your wings and fly! Become the eagle that you are.'

'But still the bird did not accept its true power. Not knowing what to do the eagle's powerful vision swept back and forth from his coup to the sky. He could see the chickens pecking at their food, and felt that he needed to be back there. Then, as if spying something far in the distance, he began to tremble and slowly stretched out his wings. It seemed to the hermit that the eagle was growing in stature and, just at the moment when he could no longer hold him, the great eagle let out a triumphant cry and soared into the heavens.



'In letting go of what it had been conditioned to need, the eagle was able to gain its heart's desire, although attachment to what it considered its security to be prevented it from immediately knowing this. None of us were born to scratch out our needs in the dust. Yet, in forgetting our true identity, many of us cede our immense power for realising our desires in favour of the needs that circumstances and conditioning dictate for our security. It is the ability to let go of what you think you need that gives you the power to realise your desires.'