Lessons for Dermatology from the Tao Te Ching

Clay J. Cockerell, M.D.
Steven Shama, M.D.
Dedicated to My Friend
Stuart M. Brown, M.D.
6/17/1930-9/27/2015
Disclosures

• While I have no “medical” disclosures, I do disclose that I am a poor practitioner of much of what we will be discussing today.
• I am NOT a guru, spiritual master, enlightened person, Buddha or any other such “expert.”
• I am here to share some things that have been helpful to me and I hope they may be helpful to you, too.
This is a “spiritual” interactive session, not a lecture
Why This Forum?

We Need This!

• Many physicians are “burned out.” More than 50%!!!
  – Medical Economics article recently listed 15 pressures facing physicians today
  – Couldn’t it have just been 2 or 3???

• Dermatologists traditionally last or near last in medical specialties
  – Between 2011 and 2014: largest increase of any specialty: from 32-57%!
  – Now 9th highest; up from 23 of 24 specialties
Burnout: emotional exhaustion, loss of meaning in work, feelings of ineffectiveness

5 Drivers: excessive workload, inefficiency, loss of autonomy, problems with work-life balance, loss of meaning in work
Top 15 challenges facing physicians in 2015

Master challenges by maximizing efficiency
Top 15 Challenges

- ICD-10
- HIPPA
- Meaningful Use 2
- Getting paid: the ACA’s impact on reimbursement
- Maintenance of certification
- Collecting co-pays and deductibles
- Administrative burdens
- Rising operational costs

- Pay for performance
- Independence vs performance
- Payers dictating healthcare
- Patients dictating healthcare
- Keeping pace with technology
- Staff retention
- Avoiding liability
Do you support the attached petition to amend the AAD Bylaws (why or why not), and if elected, would you support non-participation as a means of ending ABD/ABMS time limited certification and MOC?

Walter Wood, MD, FAAD

P.S. Candidates please note, there is no requirement for any candidate to answer any question on this forum or the AAD Town Hall, but if a candidate wants to answer but prefers not to subscribe to the dermatologist only Dermchat or Rx-derm-1 lists for purposes of replying directly to the lists, you may reply to me for your reply to be forwarded to Dermchat and Rx-derm-1, and/or to candidates@aad.org so your reply can be posted to the AAD website Town Hall.
Other Issues

• Disenchantment with medicine in general
  – Behavior of colleagues
  – *Expectation of perfection vs appreciation of excellence* by patients and society

• Large corporations and hospitals buying practices and altering them

• Fewer physicians opting to go into private practice; joining existing organizations and hospitals
What Are Some Ways To Combat These Pressures?

• Medicine still a noble profession; affords us the opportunity to make a positive difference in people’s lives
• About developing approach to re-connect with what is noble about medicine, dermatology in particular
• Natural law: direct relationship between amount of service we provide to degree of success and impact we have on others
What Are Some Tools Available?

- Reading and absorbing the Tao Te Ching
- Wayne Dyer: excellent books, audio and video programs
- AMA “Steps Forward” Program
- Meditating, especially “loving-kindness” meditation
- Practicing Gratitude
  - Keep a gratitude journal
- Practicing self-compassion
- Being Giving
May 10, 1940-August 30, 2015
Improve patient satisfaction, quality outcomes and provider recruitment and retention.

Preventing physician burnout

AMA IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

CME CREDITS: 0.5
INFORMATION ABOUT CME

How will this module help me successfully eliminate burnout and adopt wellness approaches in my practice?

1. Seven key steps to help you prevent provider burnout
2. Ten-item survey designed to assist you in assessing burnout
3. Examples of successful burnout prevention programs in a variety of practice/organization settings

Share

Download module as PDF
The Parents Are Alright

Media coverage of a new study suggests that becoming a parent hurts happiness more than losing your spouse. Really?

Plus: Why new paternity leave policies aren't enough.

How to Get Your Kid to Talk about What Happened at School

Education, Family & Couples | August 19, 2015

Our kids' lives are not our lives. Once you recognize that fact, says
METTA MEDITATION

The practice of Metta meditation is a beautiful support to other awareness practices. One recites specific words and phrases evoking a "boundless warm-hearted feeling." The strength of this feeling is not limited to or by family, religion, or social class. We begin with our self and gradually extend the wish for well-being happiness to all beings.

There are different descriptions of the practice. The following is a basic set of instructions from the book "The Issue at Hand" by Gil Fronsdal written as a gift to the community. It is freely given.

Brief Instructions for Loving-Kindness Meditation

To practice loving-kindness meditation, sit in a comfortable and relaxed manner. Take two or three deep breaths with slow, long and complete exhalations. Let go of any concerns or preoccupations. For a few minutes, feel or imagine the breath moving through the center of your chest - in the area of your heart.

Metta is first practiced toward oneself, since we often have difficulty loving others without first loving ourselves. Sitting quietly, mentally repeat, slowly and steadily, the following or similar phrases:

May I be happy. May I be well. May I be safe. May I be peaceful and at ease.

While you say these phrases, allow yourself to sink into the intentions they express. Loving-kindness meditation consists primarily of connecting to the intention of wishing ourselves or others happiness. However, if feelings of warmth, friendliness, or love arise in the body or mind, connect to them, allowing them to grow as you repeat the phrases. As an aid to the meditation, you might hold an image of yourself in your mind’s eye. This helps reinforce the intentions expressed in the phrases.

After a period of directing loving-kindness toward yourself, bring to mind a friend or someone in your life who has deeply cared for you. Then slowly repeat phrases of loving-kindness toward them:

May you be happy. May you be well. May you be safe. May you be peaceful and at ease.
Metta Phrases

• Metta: Pali word meaning “loving-kindness;” concern with well-being of sentient beings
• If you cannot be loving and kind to yourself, you cannot be to others
• Metta Phrases:
  – May I be safe; may I be happy; may I be healthy; may I live life in peace
• Once you can accept them yourself, you can spread them to others
Gratitude and Self-Compassion

• Robert Emmons, Ph.D.: Pioneer in the positive psychology movement; doctoral work in gratitude
• Kristin Neff, Ph.D.: Psychology Professor, University of Texas Austin, docorate in self-compassion
“It is impossible to be grateful and depressed at the same time.”

Robert Emmons, Ph.D.
“Positive thoughts about ourselves are like Teflon. They slide right off. Negative thoughts are like Velcro. They stick!”

Kristin Neff, Ph.D.
The Tao Te Ching

The Way of Life
according to
Laotzu
translated by
Witter Bynner
What is the Tao Te Ching?

• A classic Chinese text written around 6th century BC by Lao Tzu ("Old Master")
• Fundamental text for Taoism
• Major influence on all of Chinese culture
• 81 sections
• Many translations but I like one by Witter Bynner the best
Witter Bynner 1881-1968

- American poet, writer and scholar
- Spent time in Asia in 1917-1921
- Began translating T’ang Dynasty poems
- Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry established in 1972
John Lennon Reading from Bynner’s Tao Translation to Yoko Ono at “Bed In” Montreal, May 1969
“The way to do is to be.”
Structure of This Session

- Verse presented
- Think about it for a few moments
- Reflect on current situation
- Discuss the verse and share insights
People, through finding something beautiful,
Think something else unbeautiful;
Through finding one man fit
Judge another unfit.
Life and death, though stemming from each other, seem to conflict as stages of change;
Difficult and easy as phases of achievement,
Long and short as measures of contrast,
High and low as degrees of relation.

But, since the varying of tones gives music to a voice,
And what is is the was of what shall be,
The sanest man
Sets up no deed,
Lays down no law,
Takes everything that happens as it comes,
As something to animate, not to appropriate,
To earn, not to own,
To accept naturally without self-importance:
If you never assume importance
You never lose it.
Thoughts

• We often judge something as one way yet if looked at in another perspective, it may have a completely different meaning or interpretation.
  – “What happened versus what I made it mean.”
• Take what comes up.
  – We are here to interact with nature not to control it.
• We are here to earn, not to own.
• Never assume self-importance.
  – “Pride goeth before a fall.”
It is better not to make merit a matter of reward
Lest people conspire and contend,
Not to pile up rich belongings
Lest they rob,
Not to excite by display
Lest they covet.
A sound leader’s aim
Is to open people's hearts,
Fill their stomachs,
Calm their wills,
Brace their bones
And so to clarify their thoughts and cleanse their needs
That no cunning meddler could touch them:
Without being forced, without strain or constraint,
Good government comes of itself.
Thoughts

• What happens when we “reward” accomplishments?
  – What happens when ego-driven rewards become all-important?

• What is the best way to govern a practice?
  – A state or nation?

• What does this say about regulations?
Man at his best, like water,
Serves as he goes along:
Like water he seeks his own level,
The common level of life,
Loves living close to the earth,
Living clear down in his heart,
Loves kinship with his neighbors,
The pick of words that tell the truth,
The even tenor of a well-run state,
The fair profit of able dealing,
The right timing of useful deeds,
And for blocking no one's way
No one blames him.
Thoughts

• What does this verse say about service?
• What is your mission for service in your practice?
• Where does service rank in importance in your practice?
  – In your life?
A leader is best
When people barely know that he exists,
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him,
Worst when they despise him.
“Fail to honor people,
They fail to honor you;”
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will all say, “We did this ourselves.”
Thoughts

• What does this verse say about ego? Selfless leadership?
  – The “servant leader”

• Are you “ok” with this? *Really*?

• What does this verse say about taking credit?
  – Being “right?”

• What does this verse say about interpersonal relationships?
Keep stretching a bow
You repent of the pull,
A whetted saw
Goes thin and dull,
Surrounded with treasure
You lie ill at ease,
Proud beyond measure
You come to your knees:
Do enough, without vieing,
Be living, not dying.
The five colors can blind,
The five tones deafen,
The five tastes cloy.  
The race, the hunt, can drive men mad
And their booty leave them no peace.
Therefore a sensible man
Prefers the inner to the outer eye:
He has his yes; he has his no.
Thoughts

• What do these verses say about accomplishment, price, stress, competition and resistance?
  – About over-achievement?
  – Can we have too much?
• What does verse 12 say about being true to oneself?
  – How many times do we “accommodate?”
Thirty spokes are made one by holes in a hub,
By vacancies joining them for a wheel's use;
The use of clay in molding pitchers
Comes from the hollow of its absence;
Doors, windows, in a house,
Are used for their emptiness:
Thus we are helped by what is not
To use what is.
Thoughts

• What does this verse say about forcing and allowing?
• Where do we focus most of our attention—on what is there or what is not?
  – Content or context?
• Which is more important?
“Yield and you need not break:”
Bent you can straighten,
Emptied you can hold,
Torn you can mend;
And as want can reward you
So wealth can bewilder.
Aware of this, a wise one has the simple return
Which others seek:
Without inflaming himself
He is kindled,
Without explaining himself

Is explained,
Without taking credit
Is accredited,
Laying no claim
Is acclaimed
And, because he does not compete,
Finds peaceful competence.
How true is the old saying,
“Yield and you need not break!”
How completely it comes home!
Thoughts

• What does this verse say about interacting with the world and society?
  – About ego? Resistance? Competition?

• What does this verse say about judging?
  – Pessimism vs Optimism
  – Glass “half full” or “half empty?”
Nature does not have to insist,
Can blow for only half a morning,
Rain for only half a day.
If nature does not have to insist,
Why should we?
It is natural
That whoever follows the way of life feels alive,
That whoever uses it properly feels well used,

Whereas one who loses the way of life feels lost,
That whoever keeps to the way of life
Feels at home,
Whoever uses it properly
Feels welcome,
Whereas one who uses it improperly
Feels improperly used:
“Fail to honor people,
They fail to honor you.”
Thoughts

• What does this say about resistance, demanding and its contrast?
• How does nature deal with things versus how we do?
• What does this say about treating others with voice, dignity and respect?
  – What happens if we do? What happens if we do not?
Even the finest arms are an instrument of evil,
A spread of plague,
No measure for thoughtful ones
Until there fail all other choice
But sad acceptance of it.
Triumph is not beautiful.
He who thinks triumph beautiful
Is one with a will to kill,
And one with a will to kill shall never prevail upon the world.
It is a bad sign when the lower nature comes forward,
When retainers take charge
And the master stays back
As in the conduct of a funeral.
The death of a multitude is cause for mourning:
Conduct your triumph as a funeral.
Thoughts

• What does this verse say about conflict?
• When you “win” something, how should you treat that?
The greatest perfection seems imperfect, yet its use is inexhaustible.
True straightness seems crooked.
True eloquence seems awkward.
True wisdom seems foolish.
True art seems artless.
The Master allows things to happen.
He shapes events as they come. He steps out of the way and allows the Tao to speak for itself.
Thoughts

• “True wisdom seems foolish.”
  – The more I reflect about this, the more I realize that the things I judge as being “good,” “competent,” etc. are very likely wrong.
  – The “wise fool.” Wisdom shows up in unexpected places

• What are some situations where you think something was foolish yet it was truly wise?
The way to use life is to do nothing through acting,
The way to use life is to do everything through being.
When a leader knows this,
His land naturally goes straight.
And the world's passion to stray from straightness
Is checked at the core
By the simple unnamable cleanness
Through which we cease from coveting.
And to a land where we cease from coveting,
Peace comes of course.
Thoughts

- Which is more important: being, doing or having?
  - Which do we spend most of our time focusing on?
- What does this say about how to interact with life and the world?
Which means more to you,  
You or your renown?  
Which brings more to you,  
You or what you own?  
And which would cost you more  
If it were gone?
Thoughts

• What does this verse say about materialism and ego?
• What does this verse tell us about fame?
• What does this verse say about scarcity versus abundance?
• How frequently do we ask ourselves, before we act, “Is this the wise thing to do?”
The less a leader does and says
The happier his people,
The more a leader struts and brags
The sorrier his people.
Often what appears to be unhappiness is happiness
And what appears to be happiness is unhappiness.

Therefore a sound person shall so square the circle
And circle the square as not to injure, not to impede:
The glow of one’s life shall not daze,
It shall lead.
Thoughts

• What does this verse say about leadership and ego?
• Do you know people who like to broadcast their accomplishments? How do you enjoy interacting with them?
One who knows how little one knows is well,
One who knows how much one knows is sick.
If, when you see the symptoms, you can tell,
Your cure is quick.
A sound person knows that sickness makes one sick
And before one catches it, one’s cure is quick.
Thoughts

• What does this verse say about self-importance and self knowledge?
Existence, by nothing bred, 
Breeds everything. 
Parent of the universe, 
It smooths rough edges, 
Unties hard knots, 
Tempers the sharp sun, 
Lays blowing dust, 
Its image in the wellspring never fails. 
But how was it conceived?--this image 
Of no other sire.
Thoughts

• How does the Universe accomplish things?
• How do we accomplish things? (Or “try” to accomplish things?)
• What does this say about resistance and “flow?”
The universe is deathless, 
Is deathless because, having no finite self, 
It stays infinite. 
A sound man by not advancing himself 
Stays the further ahead of himself, 
By not confining himself to himself 
Sustains himself outside himself: 
By never being an end in himself 
He endlessly becomes himself.
Thoughts

• How does our ego get in the way of our success?
• How does this contrast with how the Universe deals with issues?
Thank You!

• It was an honor to share this session with you.
• May you be safe; may you be happy; may you be healthy; may you live life in peace.
Please send me your comments!

ccockerell@dermpath.com
References and Recommended Readings

References and Recommended Readings
