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Fill Your Bowl to the Brim and It Will Spill

By Whitney Simon

When reading the work of Lao Tzu, I found myself deeply touched by his simple yet powerful words. The way he looked at the world and himself made me yearn to live a Taoist life. In *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu describes the steps that are necessary to live a serene life. He writes:

Fill your bowl to the brim and it will spill.
Keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt.
Chase after money and security and your heart will never unclench.
Care about people's approval and you will be their prisoner.
Do your work, then step back.
The only path to serenity." (*Tao Te Ching*, 9)

I recall reading this passage repeatedly because at first, I could not fully understand it. For the past four years, I have dedicated every waking moment to being the best student, colleague, and friend that I could possibly be. I have participated in countless activities, worked multiple jobs, befriended many people and made every effort to be a top student, without ever really taking a moment to appreciate all that I have done. It is only after reading Lao Tzu's words that I realized that my constant need to excel at something has left me feeling anxious, overwhelmed, and burned out. To use Lao Tzu's analogy, I have filled my bowl to the brim and now it is spilling all over my life. The excitement and vitality that I once felt towards my education is now depleted and I find myself resenting school.

While reading the beautiful passages of *Tao Te Ching*, I realize that I need to find peace and serenity within so that I can once again find that passion that I once had for academia and life. I want to be able to work hard and then appreciate that rather than just throwing myself into another project in hopes that all this hard work will lead to my happiness. As Chuang Tzu wisely states in *Perfect Joy*, "Contentment and well-being at once become possible the moment you cease to act with them in view, and if you practice non-doing (*wu-wei*), you will have both happiness and well-being." (Chuang Tzu, 101) I realize that my happiness will only come from my acceptance of the past, immersion in the present and my hope for the future.