

Awaking In A Dream

By Stone Riley

Painting and poem © 2000

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There are many tales, of course, of Lao Tzu who, according to the legends, wrote The Watercourse Way, a little book of nature poetry upon which other thinkers then built up the lean, beautiful and tough spiritual philosophy of Taoism. Here's one of them.

The story flies us to the early morning of a day when our hero was a bright but sorrowful young man. He was a bureaucratic junior clerk in the palace of a rich and brutal warlord prince. The sparkling morning and the budding springtime garden grounds through which he trod to work belied the torment in the young man's soul. This day's duty was to be an awful deed which no one with an open heart could ever wish.

The garden path led on across a footbridge on a lovely brook and, setting foot onto the rising boards, his paces further slacked. His gaze was beckoned to the sparkling water. On the arch's highest little height the now unconscious footsteps stopped and -- mind, heart and soul -- he found himself drawn out into the clear deep rippling stream.

This was the moment when a human asks of "there" and "here". As another poet wrote, do I dream the butterfly or does the butterfly dream me? Gazing deep into the world I see only countless things which mirror me, so what are "you" and "I" and what am "I" to do?

But in this young man's mind no riddle of that sort found any weight. The doubtless fundamental knowledge that this clarity exists would henceforth lure and guide his thoughts and steps. The beauty of reality had ravished Lao Tzu and he was struck with lifelong love.



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Acrylic paint on canvas, 2000

48 x 24 inches = 122 x 161 cm