



It's Your Choice

The other day I went shopping and, instead of concentrating on what I was going to buy, I watched people's faces. What I saw was shocking. At least half of the people looked as though they were suffering from extreme stress or shock of some kind. Some faces were contorted to the extent that one wondered if they were ill. Yet, if you asked these people if they were willing to change themselves so as to have a better life, practically all would answer, "No." Strange. Unhappy circumstances will usually not change unless the suffering person changes the ground from which they rose — his or her mental attitudes and mistaken way of living.

I could sympathize with these people. Our lives are filled with needless stress and [we] suffer from an over-competitive society. Technology is bringing change after change with the promise that the changes, too fast for the populace to assimilate, will make us happier. It won't. Going from the natural to the artificial never made anybody happy. People travel to look for a more primitive life while buying computers, fax machines, and all the push-button machines that are now in vogue.

Paul Reps was a perfectly free man, almost the only one I ever met. One day, many years ago when I lived in the hills of Los Angeles, I invited a movie actor to come to my house and play chess with Paul, who was staying with me. Meanwhile, I was off to work in the stock market.

When I returned home after work, Louis (the actor) took me aside and complained, "That little guy! He can pick himself up and go anywhere in the world on a moment's notice!" (Paul had only a small bag he slung over his shoulder to carry his meager possessions.)

"You can do the same, Louis," I pointed out. But no, his agent couldn't reach him, his wife (whom he seldom saw) wouldn't be there, what would he do for money, etc. Louis was tied to a post and wouldn't change his life one iota, though he envied Paul.

There will be more and more mental illness, people tied to the torture rack of working in the big city under great pressure, the desire to keep up with others who have expensive gadgets. It almost sounds to me like the fall of the Roman Empire.

The artificial is harmful. Digest that and look to see if your life is ruled by machines. Thoreau said to go in the direction you want to go, not in the direction in which you are pushed. With T'ai Chi Chih and meditation as a firm background, you should be able to make a better life, one that can be lived with gratitude.

Justin Stowe

