

The Ten Thousand Things

A story of the lived experience of the I Ching



Glenn Martin

Praise for *The Ten Thousand Things*

“A delightful and insightful journey of personal exploration and reflection. A compelling journey into one’s quest for inner peace and mastery in life. Glenn Martin has inspired me.”

—Alastair Rylatt (author of *Winning the Knowledge Game*)

“The book is a significant addition to the literature on business ethics as it reveals, through the novel form, how unethical situations emerge and the dilemma that challenges good people in the face of unethical behaviour by high-power people. Either no one stands up to the perpetrators, or what can happen to the brave souls who do.”

—Andrew O’Keeffe (author of *The Boss*)

“I very much liked the story Martin told. It is compelling, and his search for inner guidance and wisdom through the I Ching, illuminating. Highly recommended as a good read for anyone interested in a fascinating story of self-discovery. For managers, and those who have a need to influence others, there are many good tips that show how both easy and tough decisions can be made whilst remaining true to one’s self.”

—Bob Selden (author of *What to do when you become the boss*)

“As a leadership study the book is unusual in that it highlights the important ethical dimensions of the leadership role and the inevitable pressures and conflict potential that come with it.”

—Dr Klaas Woldring (Southern Cross University (retired))

“The book provides some valuable insights into how unethical behaviour by senior managers can emerge within an organisation, how it influences the actions of others, and what options a line manager may have to combat it. Probably because it is based on a true story, the book is both a moving account of the events and a bit confronting to the reader when the extent of the nasty politics is revealed. Many readers will be able to relate to the conflicts that arise.”

—Mike Toten (writer for *Workplace Info*)

A NOVEL

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The Ten Thousand Things

A story of the lived experience of the I Ching

GLENN MARTIN (1950–) was born in Sydney, Australia and grew up there. He married and moved to the far north coast of New South Wales in the mid-1970s, in search of an alternative life style. He and his wife had four children before they separated, and the children went to live in the Blue Mountains. He stayed in Kyogle, living there for 20 years, and he has a child from another relationship in those years. He held a variety of jobs: teaching in high schools, working in community service projects, and managing organisations in the community sector.

He studied for a business degree in his forties, then returned to Sydney, where he makes a living as a writer and consultant on human resource management, employment law, training and development, online learning and business ethics. He is also editor for a training magazine.

Glenn's first two books were local histories: *Places in the Bush: A history of the Kyogle Shire* (1988) and *The Kyogle Public School Centenary Book* (1995). He wrote and self-published a book on ethics in 2007: *Human Values and Ethics in the Workplace*. At the same time, he released two collections of poems and personal stories: *Flames in the Open* and *Love and Armour*.

The Ten Thousand Things is Glenn's first novel.

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of the I Ching

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The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the everlasting name.
The nameless is the originator of heaven and earth.
The named is the mother of the ten thousand things.
Without desire we can see the mystery.
Desiring, we see only the manifestations.
These two aspects are one in source but differ in name;
together we call them darkness.
Deep and yet more deep,
the gate to all that is subtle and wonderful.

Verse 1 of the Tao Te Ching, by Lao Tzu

Preface

I am the author, and it is not my intent here to say more than an author should say about his own book. Allow me to say, though, some things for clarification. This is a “true story”, in that it is based on events that have occurred. That said, I have employed a novelist’s licence to play with people, places and sequences of time. Some people are compressed into one character, for example, and other characters omitted for the sake of simplicity. I was telling a story here, a story I had never told before because it was too complicated as well as too emotional.

Nonetheless, you will get the picture – there is truth here. For those who know me and any of the situations and events in these pages, you may think “That’s me”, or “Why am I not there?”. I ask you to bow to the story. I had my reasons, both as novelist and at a personal level. The universe knows all of the ten thousand things, you included.

The I Ching would say the quest was for “Chung Fu”: Inner truth. In that I have sought to be faithful.

This story began as a project to write a book in ninety days. I wasn’t daunted by that. I had an outline in my head for a non-fiction book that would be a simple exposition of the ideas in the ethics book I had written: *Human Values and Ethics in the Workplace*. That book was “semi-academic”. My intent there had been to explain the ideas I had about ethics and human values, and I placed my ideas in the context of other writers’ ideas, as an academic work which referenced them.

The book wasn’t altogether an academic book because it also had pastoral elements, that is, practical elements about how to live, work and lead ethically in organisations and in business.

So the second book was going to be simpler and hopefully accessible to a wider range of readers.

I was ready to start work on this when one of my sons suggested that I enter National Novel Writing Month (Nano Wrimo). I told him I wasn't interested, because I was writing non-fiction. And then he said, "Well, write it as a novel".

This was an astounding thought to me. It was a liberation. This meant I didn't have to be diverted by being pedantic about dates and people and places and complications. I could stick to the truth of the story. It also meant I didn't have to think about naming people, and all the implications of that. This is not a book about recrimination; it is a book about the lessons we find in living.

Nano Wrimo also meant writing in a totally different way to how I normally write. I am usually a planner – outlines, homework, facts, structure. Taking my time, being reflective and going back over what I've written, usually several times. Nano Wrimo meant diving into the river and swimming with the current. I didn't look back at all. I kept moving with the flow for a month, just about every day. The story kept pouring out and I kept following the rush of it.

I wrote a blog while I was writing the novel, to reflect on what I was doing. You can find the blog at <http://www.writerinaction.blogspot.com>

The I Ching. The other reason for this book is that I have been using the I Ching for a long time – over thirty years. I've never talked about it in public. I thought it might seem crazy in the business world to talk about guidance and advice that originated in markings on a tortoise's back over five thousand years ago. Mmm. Now I have arrived at the point where I think I should say something about the writings that constitute the underpinning of my thinking. To say the I Ching has influenced me is to underplay it; it is the framework and heart of my thinking now.

There are many books which are translations and interpr-

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etations of the I Ching, and handbooks on how to use it. I don't know of any books on what it is like to live with the I Ching as a companion, over a long period of time. This novel, insofar as it has any message at all, aims to give an insight into what you can learn in the midst of situations if you are sincere, open, and committed to personal integrity.

The novel is also distinguished by the fact that it was written hand in hand with the I Ching. The readings in the book occurred in real time as I wrote. Each day of writing was preceded by the throwing of the coins and a meditation on the reading, as I digested the I Ching's perspective on the situation as it was unfolding.

The novel is not suggesting that anyone become an I Ching "devotee" and I would not describe myself as such. There are many sources of wisdom and guidance which are available to us. This story shows what can happen when one is willing to listen to the wisdom of the universe.

If you go back a few paragraphs you will see that I jumped across a river. (The I Ching would say, "crossing the great stream".) At one point I was talking about an exposition of ideas on ethics and human values, and suddenly I was talking about a story. How did that happen?

It happened because the central story in this novel is about a period of my life when I experienced people and events that held ethics up to my face in an intense way. This series of events was what made me start thinking in a serious way about ethics in business, and why people do the things they do. Essentially, this story explains why I am so interested in ethics and human values.

The non-fiction book remains to be written. This book needed writing first.

Time to stop talking? Almost. Just one other thing. The more I have thought about what it means to live ethically, the more I see that it is tied up with living in the present, doing what needs to be done in the moment. And this takes us into questions about our

whole life and what we are doing with it. Living ethically is much more than abiding by a set of rules. It includes our choices about jobs, careers, where we live, who we live with, who we love, and our aspirations. Everything. The ten thousand things.

The I Ching says there are two things in life: correctness, and joy.

Enjoy.

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In *The Ten Thousand Things*, a man leaves the city behind him and seeks out an alternative way of living with his wife. But the hoped-for experience of communal living does not eventuate and his disappointment is compounded by the shock of his wife leaving him.

Subsequently he is drawn back into involvement with society through a job with a community organisation. He brings with him as a companion the *I Ching*, the ancient Chinese book of changes. The next few years of learning how to be a manager and a leader present him with a wealth of experiences and more than a few challenges. He learns to listen to the wisdom of the book.

But there were seeds of trouble when he took on the job (not to mention an embezzlement that left the organisation with no money), and the seeds ultimately come to fruition. He finds himself attacked and isolated, and it seems that he will be crushed and all his achievements obliterated. But perhaps all is not lost, and along the way there is love. And at every step the *I Ching* assists him to live ethically and to find the joy that lies at the heart of all things.

This is Glenn Martin's first novel.

