

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 the author 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*)

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*A story of the lived experience
of the I Ching*

Glenn Martin

G.P. Martin Publishing



The Ten Thousand Things: A story of the lived experience of the I
Ching

By Glenn Martin

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Websites: www.glenmartin.com.au

www.ethics.andvalues.com.au

Contact: glenn@glenmartin.com.au

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Glenn Martin asserts his moral rights as the author of this book.

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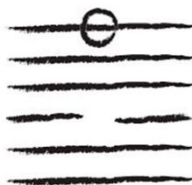
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Chapter 1: The beginning



They say stories always start at the beginning. But I say a story always starts now. The beginning is something that has to be discovered, after you have written yourself into the now. “Now” may be just a moment in the flow of time, but we can also look at it as the connection between an immense past and a limitless future. If we look at it that way, the essence of “now” is opportunity.

I have a library. It has three to four thousand books, which have accumulated over many years. The library holds clues to my story. Like the comment from Umberto Eco in *How to travel with a salmon and other essays*. He addresses the question of what you say when people ask you if you have read all the books in your library. He hadn’t. Nor have I.

He has various suggestions. For example, you can tell them that your other books are at the office, and these are just the ones you will read before the end of the month. My response is that the books sit in the now, and I am in the midst. I’ve read most of them – in one respect, our past is cumulative. Some of them I’ve bought at book fairs, which are a treasure trove for finding the highlights of what I am thinking about at the time.

What I can say is that I don’t buy books that don’t interest me. The library is *my* library. It is a reflection of my thoughts and interests over time. It is like a river. One of my sons came to live with me a couple of years ago. He brought boxes of CDs, and one of the first things he did was build a set of wooden shelves for the CDs. After he had stacked the shelves, I had a look through his collection. I couldn’t make sense of

the order. It wasn't alphabetical by the names of the groups, and it wasn't alphabetical by album title.

I gave up and asked him. He told me they were in order of purchase. I thought that was a fabulous concept. I can see how that would have been a great way to arrange my books. Too late. I would had to have started that way many years ago. I have resorted to a (rough) Dewey system.

But the library is not the story. The library just holds some of the clues. Although you must know I am conscious of the threat of the library taking over. I have been warned often enough, and I declare that I am vigilant.

I wrote a poem when I was a teenager, speculating about my future. Part of it said:

“How will it be? Forty-two, and comfortably walled in with books?”

I am way past forty-two now, and I don't use my library as a hiding place. It's closer to being a war room, a place where generals formulate their strategy, their next great move. I get strength, guidance and inspiration here.

One of my daughters sent me a postcard she found in England on her travels. It was a black and white photo of a hallway with stairs leading up to another floor. Everywhere around the floor was covered with piles of books, and up the stairs as well. It's cluttered and in disarray.

Is my library in disarray? No. Therefore, it's okay. It is. The postcard does raise the issues of space and order. I have already told you that I manage to maintain a moderate sense of order that would be discernible, if not entirely understandable, to the visitor. Space is a concern, but not yet a crisis. There is a game of leap-frog, where occasionally I have to build a new set of shelves and reconfigure the room before I buy more books. I suppose this can't go on forever.

But then we have now, which is where we begin. There is still some vacant shelf space, and I can navigate my way around knowingly. Perhaps when there is no more space – the shelves fill all the available walls, and the shelves go up to the ceiling – I will simply stop buying

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books. I know some of my family doubt this. There is a sympathetic concern that this could be an addiction.

I remind them of Forrest Gump. Remember that moment in the movie when he stopped what he was doing, and just started running? At any moment, you can stop whatever it is, and chart out a new course. Know this.

I have called my story “The ten thousand things”. A word of reassurance for you: I am not going to enumerate. No, there are not ten thousand things in the literal sense. Any kind of list becomes boring after a while. There are not even “ten tips” in the story. I haven’t compiled a set of ten magical things you can do to change your life, be successful, have a thriving garden or remain youthful.

The ten thousand things is a metaphor. It’s an expression from the *Tao Te Ching*. Life comes from the void. “The Tao that can be named is not the eternal Tao. As nameless, the Tao is the origin of all things. It is the mother of the ten thousand things.”

It’s the ten thousand things that engage, confuse, infuriate and amaze us. It’s the pandemonium of daily life and the effort it takes to keep a hold on “who I am” over time. It’s the struggle to feel a sense of understanding, peace and mastery across the bewildering array of what happens from day to day. And the deep desire to know whether love matters.

I sense some annoyance. You are being patient, but you are beginning to wonder, where is the story? Can we get to the beginning?

Chapter 2: Returning



It began with a book. I had been brought up as an Anglican, and I had been heavily involved in the church in my late teens and early twenties. But then it was the late sixties, and everything was in tumult. Everything was up for questioning. When I got together with Alice, the air was full of dope smoke and eastern religions.

I had read a book by William Sargeant that subjected evangelical Christianity to a sociological analysis. In other words, instead of looking at the preaching and the calls to “accept Jesus into your life” as the expression of faith in a literal reality, let’s just look at the behaviour, as the behaviour of a group of people, using psychological and sociological concepts. And when I went through the process, and looked at it that way, I found the behaviour disturbing – and much of it I considered to be unethical. It was manipulative and it served mainly to make people dependent on an external structure.

But that’s not the book I wish to talk about. (I should note that I

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am being very disciplined here. The thought occurred to me that it would be appropriate at this point to mention Bishop John Shelby Spong, whose books on Christianity are likewise prepared to look at the stories in the Bible from an ethical perspective. For example, is it really acceptable to slaughter all the “enemies of the Lord”? I would have mentioned *The Sins of Scripture* (which I have not finished reading yet). But then we might soon get lost, both you and I. So, I will seek to curb my manifold stray thoughts, and keep to the path.)

The book that the story begins with is the I Ching. Alice, who is long gone these days, introduced me to some wonderful things. Ironically, all things that she herself has left behind. Like the music of Yes and Santana. Like the *Tao Te Ching*. She had a beautiful version of it, in A4 format, paperback, where each double page had the words on one page and a black and white photograph on the other. They were very atmospheric photos, very evocative of life beyond the pedestrian realities of modern city life. This was the Jane English / Gia Fu Feng version, published in 1972.

I still have that book. Yes, when Alice left, she physically left that book behind. But she left it behind in the other sense as well. She also left the I Ching. Now there are (in the library) many I Ching books. But I still have that first one. It’s a hardback with a dust cover. The dust cover is so worn that the front page has separated. I have used that book so much it’s like the velveteen rabbit, whose fur was all worn off by the love of its child owner.

We also had a set of I Ching cards in a box, along with a set of three coins for throwing. I’m going to assume this is new to you, although I’m not going to give you a treatise on the whole history of the I Ching. We have a story to follow, and there are libraries where you can go to do further research. My library? Well, I don’t have memberships, and most people who borrow books tend to keep them (and I understand that). You will have to make your own commitments. I let friends and family browse. There are comfortable lounges and a big table for spreading out books and papers.

As someone brought up on the Bible, in a protestant church, the idea of the I Ching was preposterous: the idea that you would not read

this book, which one would normally do, preferably sequentially, and have one big story that formed the basis of your philosophy. The idea that, instead, you would ask it a question and then throw the three coins, six times, and draw six lines on a piece of paper based on the results of the coin throws. And you would then read what the book had to say about the hexagram (or kua) that you got.

To make it even more preposterous, the I Ching had a reputation as a book of divination, a tool for predicting the future. To a person with a history of piety and loyalty to the Bible, trying to find out what the future holds was regarded as forbidden. It was a denial of faith and an affront to God. But the version of the I Ching that Alice had discovered and purchased was the Wilhelm / Baynes version with a foreword by Carl Jung. And given my new familiarity with and respect for the world of psychology and sociology, this was a persuasive factor in my willingness to engage with the I Ching.

Alice and I were living in a house with two other men. James was particularly interested in the I Ching and approached it very differently to me. The pious part of me wanted to handle the I Ching piously. People should treat it as something sacred, and use it solemnly and only for serious matters. Alice and I would sit on the floor with candles lit and incense burning, and meditate on what the right question to ask was. We would draw the lines of the hexagram with care and read all the relevant commentary and consider all the different images that were related to the hexagram, the symbols, the relationship between the upper and lower trigrams, the moving lines, the significance of each line, what is in the ruling line, and so on.

Not James. He jumped in with both feet. While Alice or I would throw the coins once in a night and ponder deeply about the hexagram we got (or two hexagrams if there were moving lines), James would sit there for hours, throwing the coins again and again. In the morning he would talk excitedly about where it had taken him, the journey of one question after another. When he got a particular answer in response to a question, he would take the key image and focus on that, then ask another question. He would interrogate the I Ching: why did you say that? What does that mean?

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But the one hexagram I remember from that period of time was just about the key image. I was studying at university, and Alice was working in the city, and one night I was at home studying and she didn't come home in the evening. It was, like all of history up to the last ten years, the pre-mobile phone era. I didn't have her number and I couldn't call her. So, I didn't know where she was or what was happening. I had all of the paranoid thoughts, like what if she's been hurt? Or, has she left me?

With some reservations, I decided to throw the I Ching. I sat down with the coins and a piece of paper and began to shake them in my cupped hands, letting them fall out onto the floor six times – seven, eight, eight, eight, eight, eight. No moving lines. (The moving lines are six and nine.)

I'm always amazed by the patterns the coins form. There are only four outcomes each time – six, seven, eight or nine. And an equal chance of each occurring. But then you get a number that repeats itself five times in a row. There are sixty-four hexagrams in all. Everything falls into the sixty-four hexagrams – every question attracts a response from this field of meanings.

And what was the hexagram? 24: Returning. In Chinese, “Fu”. It is also called “turning point” and the commentary (written by Richard Wilhelm in China around 1900) begins “The idea of the turning point arises from the fact that after the dark lines have pushed all of the light lines upward and out of the hexagram, another light line enters the hexagram from below. The time of darkness is past.”

The judgement (each hexagram has what we might call a pronouncement) begins: “Return. Success.”

That was enough. I felt a great sense of relief. Irrational, eh? Carl Jung says in the foreword to this edition, “Western scholars have tended to dispose of [the I Ching] as a collection of ‘magic spells’”. But Richard Wilhelm, he goes on, “had over a period of many years put the peculiar technique of the oracle into practice. His grasp of the living meaning of the text gives his version of the I Ching a depth of perspective that an exclusively academic knowledge of Chinese philosophy could never provide”.

Alice came home a couple of hours later. She had been asked to work overtime at late notice, and wasn't able to call me to let me know. Everything was okay. Of course, nowadays we think of how technology has largely eliminated this type of situation. But then, it was a significant evening for me. All those dark lines, and light entering again from below. All my doubts and fears, and light entering again (as it always does).

END OF SAMPLE

About the author

Glenn Martin is a writer living in Sydney, Australia. He has written on business ethics, training and development, human resources, leadership and employment law for numerous publications for professionals.

He grew up in Sydney, but left in his early twenties. He spent twenty years living in a valley near Kyogle on the far north coast of New South Wales, before eventually returning to Sydney. He has five children, all grown, and four grandsons.

Glenn began his working life as a school teacher, but he has also been a psychiatric nurse, a coordinator of adult education, a community development officer, and the manager of organisations in the community sector.

He has been the editor and primary contributor to CCH Australia's publication *Managing Training & Development* for over ten years and he has written for several other CCH Australia titles, including numerous chapters for its *Australian Master Human Resources Guide*.

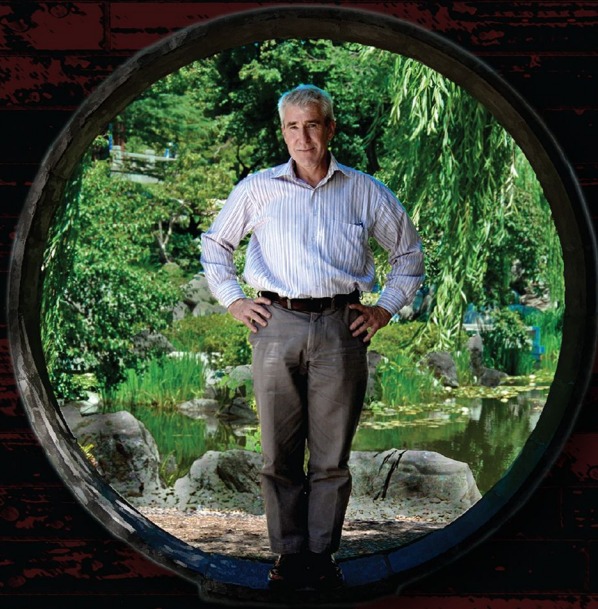
Glenn was the editor for the Australian Institute of Training and Development's magazine *Training & Development in Australia* for five years. He has also been the associate editor for the *Journal of Spirituality, Leadership and Management*.

He has written many training programs on coaching, mentoring, emotional intelligence, and work health and safety topics.

His perspective on ethics is presented in his book *Human Values and Ethics in the Workplace*, first published in 2007. Also published in 2007 were two volumes of his poetry, accompanied by personal stories: *Flames in the Open*, and *Love and Armour*.

The Ten Thousand Things is his first novel.

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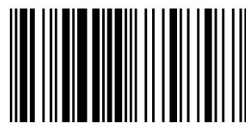


In *The Ten Thousand Things*, a man leaves the city behind him and seeks out an alternative way of living with his wife. But the hoped-for experience of communal living does not eventuate and his disappointment is compounded by the shock of his wife leaving him.

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.



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