

The Way Is Open

A photograph of a stone archway entrance in a garden. The archway is made of weathered stone and has a dark doorway. To the right of the archway, a large tree with thick, hanging roots dominates the scene. The ground is paved with reddish-brown stones. In the foreground, there are two stone benches. To the left of the archway, there are two stone lanterns on pedestals. The background shows more greenery and a brick wall.

Glenn Martin

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Contents

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Author Profile..... | 1 |
| Author's Preface..... | 2 |
| Part A: Young..... | 5 |
| A roundabout trip..... | 6 |
| Never get near the gate..... | 7 |
| History of man..... | 8 |
| Heaven must be here someplace..... | 9 |
| Just enough..... | 11 |
| After days..... | 13 |
| Love and proximity..... | 14 |
| The shape of sky..... | 15 |
| This circus..... | 16 |
| Your whole life..... | 18 |
| Part B: Living..... | 19 |
| Accidental high..... | 20 |
| Darklands..... | 21 |
| The badlands..... | 22 |
| Joy and sorrow..... | 23 |
| Kookaburra (1)..... | 25 |
| I live in the city..... | 27 |
| Family history..... | 29 |
| Science and the moon..... | 30 |
| Pragmatist..... | 31 |
| The labyrinth..... | 32 |
| A recitation for meditation..... | 33 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Articulating the crossing | 34 |
| Truth in the midst of storms | 35 |
| Kookaburra (2) | 36 |
| Part C: Firm Ground | 37 |
| The handbook of Lu, the wanderer* | 38 |
| Monk..... | 39 |
| The dry well (Ching)*..... | 40 |
| The reading..... | 41 |
| K'un (Receptive)* | 42 |
| The sage as stranger | 43 |
| Ming I: Darkening of the light* | 44 |
| Advancing in emptiness | 45 |
| Olias* | 46 |
| Waking to the moment | 47 |
| Advancing | 48 |
| The sage..... | 49 |
| The old men have a saying..... | 50 |
| In danger..... | 51 |
| The sage's undertakings | 52 |
| Kindling in the grate | 53 |
| Afterword | 54 |

Author's Preface

This collection contains poems from a broad sweep across my adult life. I started to see myself as a writer when I was aged nine, when I began to write small, rhyming verses. I liked being able to put words together in ways that entertained people and that accessed feelings. When I was eleven, I started recording my verses in an exercise book. I had some poems published in the (Sydney) *Sunday Herald's* Children's Page. And I had poems published at high school in the school's magazine, *Durian*.

However, I reached the end of high school with no idea of how to pursue life as a writer, so I opted for a utilitarian career as a high school teacher. Even in this I was thwarted, because my demonstrated knowledge was in Mathematics, not English, so I became a teacher of Mathematics. From there I moved on to other occupations, and writing had to occupy only small pockets of my life. I always had a day job; I fulfilled my financial responsibilities as an adult, husband and parent. But there was a dribble of poetry throughout the years, because for the making of poems you can create modest pockets of sufficient room.

I also learned to use words to articulate knowledge and construct arguments. I learned essays, reports, articles, papers, commentary, business plans and proposals, and I used these skills in my various jobs. There was a period of time when I lived at Kyogle when I wrote short stories too. While I was living there I was commissioned to write a history of the shire and a history of the public school (these were my first books), both of which were very well received.

I had gone to Kyogle in search of an alternative lifestyle. In a sense I achieved that for a while. It was certainly a place of retreat. But the more important gain was a developing sense of spirituality.

Eventually, when I was over fifty and back in Sydney, I put together my first collections of poems, selecting poems from right back to my early days – I keep all my poems in a large box (I was nurtured on paper, not bits and bytes). I did not seek a publisher, thinking that no one buys poetry books anyway, unless they are past masters like John Keats or T.S. Eliot, or Rabindranath Tagore. I published the books myself, and managed to sell a few copies.

In any case, I had started to write other books, particularly non-fiction books about ethics and human values. Later I added to this scope with books that I call “reflections on experience”, which were a blend of personal life history and my evolving thoughts about life. And I had started exploring my family history, and that also led to books.

My work on ethics, which culminated in a book called *A Foundation for Living Ethically*, has helped me to formulate a perspective on life. Looking back, I can see how the ideas became clearer; it shows in my poems (well, it does to me). Thus, for this collection I have selected poems that fall into three developmental concepts: “Young”, “Living” and “Firm Ground”.

The guiding light in all this has been the I Ching (the Book of Changes), which calls one to be “steadfast and upright” amidst all the vagaries of life. I have been engaged with the I Ching (and

the Tao Te Ching) for over four decades now. The goal of the practice is, I suppose, to be a master, a noble one, a sage. I say “I suppose” because truthfully there is no goal, only the present – to be attuned to all-that-is and to be in joy and correctness.

I apologise if the language may at times seem sexist. It is best to understand my use of the words as social conventions that are intended to include everyone, accepting the historical limitations of language. One does not have scope for clumsy expressions in a poem; that is the province of legislation. The noble one, for example, in my mind may just as easily be a woman as a man.

This book is not the final word, but it is a milestone. I am conscious that to say this is anachronistic; Australia had miles up until I was twenty-four, then it was all kilometres. My poems expose me several times with respect to technological changes. I see it merely as a lesson in the need for the constancy articulated in the I Ching.

Part A: Young

The only thing we did that was wrong
was to stay in the wilderness
for too long.

A roundabout trip

It's a roundabout trip,
learning to walk
two yards to mother's arms,
learning to talk in syllogisms,
acting in accordance with form.

I have known people
with springs and gear-wheels
inside their heads,
too many people,
people after the roundabout trip:

I-am-a-nine-to-five-man,
I-have-a-pretty-wife,
and-a-house,-car,-and-two-children.
Good-morning.
Good-evening.

I have seen the junk
accumulate around me
and I am crying out,
telling myself while I am still alive:
not here, not here, not here.

We have been so long in the dark
that even beauty is frightening.
Direction-blind we watch any spark
that could lead to our enlightening,
wanting to be strung out towards the mark,
and to see the distance tightening.

Let me not worship false gods.

Never get near the gate

Never get near the gate,
never get near the gate,
walk past a thousand times,
never get near the gate.

Never touch the light,
never touch the light,
see it only through the window,
never touch the light.

Walk on down the road,
walk on down the road,
nothing we ever did was right,
walk on down the road.

The larger shadows loom to take us.
What price oblivion?
God, father, maker of all
brick walls, barriers,
sound-proofed, multi-padlocked
secret-combination vaults,
holes in the ground,
forts and prison camps:
Who, who, who is the holy one?
I can never remember.

Never get near the gate,
never get near the gate.
What was the offer that you made us?
Never get near the gate.

Part B: Living

Look from the place
where we are all one,
carry the light into the day,
stay open in the heart.

I live in the city

I live in the city,
but at night I hear
the sound of the mopoke,
and in the morning the laugh
of kookaburras.

I live in the city,
but it is an abode.
I sojourn here.
I wonder about the people
who see it like a prison,
their eyes focused on a tiny square
of barred light,
hoping for Noah's dove
to bring them a branch
of olive
from some paradise
buttressed by remoteness.

I live in the city.
I admit that at night I hear
the sound of traffic and trains also.
But there is silence in between,
and it is the same silence.
I ask,
is it the traffic that is silent,
or the mopoke?
I burn a candle.
The flame is steady.
The flame burns
oxygen and travail equally.

Travail withers in the still burn
of wick in night's embrace.

It is the same light.

Part C: Firm Ground

I am not the master of the universe
but I come from bliss
and that way I serve all-that-is.

The dry well (Ching)*

Water being muddy
the well was abandoned;
dry progress followed.

The last miles at night,
wooden bridges on rough back roads —
then the neat bowl of light,
still and waiting;
coat hung on the door.

Then time for play:
the constant heart is established in joy,
solid at root beneath great trunks
but loose in the wind,
so much so that the crown sways
dangerously,
but he grins,
for his mother is the earth
and he shines
in the mystery of winning
the contest of wind with song.

** In the I Ching, Ching is hexagram 48, The Well – a place of replenishment, the constant and pure source.*

K'un (Receptive)*

The man comes quietly,
he speaks with his heart;
at the foot of the steps he says,
"Father, I am here,"
looks up and is
K'un, the Receptive.
To him the Father will speak;
he is a son of the Father
and the Father's good gifts
shower around him.
He does not seek bounty,
nor does he sit and wait for it,
but in following he finds his proper lord.
K'un is firm, steady, clear,
a reflector of the Divine Will;
here, and here again,
uncircumscribed by sorrow,
K'un is the unbound,
a dancer in the joy of the Lord.

** In the I Ching, K'un is hexagram 2, Receptive – Earth, nourishing, yin. (Hexagram 1 is Creative, Heaven, yang.)*

Waking to the moment

He treads carefully,
seeking the path through fear and anger.
In his advance his foot falls
on the tail of a snake
but his foot is firm
and the snake does not stir.

When there are only small gains to be made
he makes small gains
and admits the shortfalls of success
without envy.

In fatigue or confusion
he remembers his resolve
and finds again the union
of soul and purpose,
assured that the tangled courses
of whims, virtues and wonder
will manifest the One.

Wake to the moment, move higher,
abandon false dreams, false desire.
Flashes illumine the one course,
clear to the heart of the one source.

Afterword

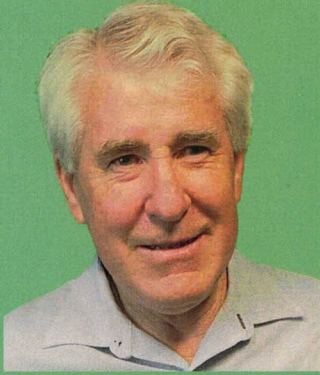
Perhaps it is necessary to say a word about the title: “The Way Is Open”. It is an expression found in both the I Ching and the Tao Te Ching. In our world of changes, sometimes the Way is open, and sometimes it is closed and one must be still and patient.

However, in a larger sense the Way is always open, because the Way expresses the nature of the universe (or all-that-is) and shows us how to live in accord with it, effortlessly.

Some say that the Tao is nonsense;
Others call it lofty but impractical.
But to those who have looked inside themselves
It makes perfect sense
And to those who put it into practice,
Its loftiness has roots that run deep.

There are three treasures that I guard and hold dear:
Simplicity, patience, compassion.
Being simple in actions and thoughts
You return to the source of being.
Being patient with both friends and enemies,
You accord with the way things are.
Being compassionate with yourself
You reconcile all beings in the world.

This is stanza 67 from the *Tao Te Ching*, mostly from Stephen Mitchell’s version (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, New York, 2006).



Glenn was born on the outskirts of Sydney in 1950, to parents who wanted him to be educated and have a professional career. He went to university and managed to become a teacher, but it was the late 1960s and universities were in tumult; he opted for the counter-culture. This took him to live in the bush, where he spent the next twenty years.

He came back to Sydney in 1997 and finally got a job as a writer and editor. He obtained a Bachelor of Business degree (and the University Medal) and a Master of Education degree. He has written fifteen books in various genres, as well as releasing four collections of poems prior to this book.



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