

you then asia

A Song of Pongs

The Mirror

what we tell anyone
what we tell friends
what we tell *some* friends
what we write in our diaries
what we don't write in our diaries
what we won't admit
even to ourselves
or do not even know

or do not even noh
even for our elves
if we canknot admit
what we hide in our diaries
cuz lies are right in our diaries
like spies that smell (some friends..)
and Lies are hell, "friends."
flies? we fell, everyone

by Merlocke Jones
for [name omitted]
(because she would 8 to even admit reading it)

you then asia
A Song of Pongs

“Keep it up”
is the objective of the game of ping pong, concisely stated.

When someone hits the ball to your side of the table, you try not to let it hit the table twice, or let it fall on the floor. You try to hit it back to them, make it fly over the net and get to their side of the table, inbounds. Like forestalling death, telling death over and over again:

Some day, sure. Some day you will get me.
I understand that is inevitable the ball will fall.
But *not today*.

“Keep it up”
is also like the mandate given to a god or demigod assigned the task of forever keeping the sun,
a spherical object often depicted as being yellow,
like tennis balls and some ping pong balls, in the sky.

The opening stanza of the story “you then asia” closes with this intention.

“Keep it up.”

The closing stanza also ends with the same intention.

This makes the “shape” of the story like a tennis court, or a ping pong table.

Two people, one on each side, hitting the ball back and forth, striving to keep the ball in the air, to keep the game going, one racket strike at a time, using a table with two sections on each side.

keeP	uP
keeP	uP

In the middle of a ping pong table, separating the sides, is a net.

A net is like a web. (Like the children’s book, *Charlotte’s Web*.)

“keep IT up,” the voices say.

The word IT is in the middle. Like the net in the center of the table. The web. Something in which one might become *entangled*. The novel, *IT*, by Stephen King, a writer whose work I admire tremendously and have tried to emulate at times, features a monster who preys mostly on children. “IT” manifests as whatever it is that people fear most. While its default setting is to appear as a clown, at the end of the novel it is revealed that IT’s true, essential form is that of a giant spider. In J.R.R. Tolkien’s epic trilogy, *Lord of the Rings*, a giant female spider, who is a former lover of the dark lord Sauron, is named *Shelob*, which is something that a girl might do with a ping pong ball: lob it over the net for her opponent (say, a boy, just for argument’s sake), to serve the next point and resume the game.

“She lob.” Which means, let’s keep playing this game. I like it. “keeP IT uP.”¹

In the precursor novel to *LOTR*, Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, the protagonist and his dwarf companions encounter a different bunch of giant spiders in Mirkwood forest. The spiders hang high in the trees and spin their webs in the branches. Bilbo Baggins, the hero, drives the spiders batty by calling out insults while he wears the One Ring, which renders him invisible.

In a similar way, the final stanza of “you then asia” takes place in some woods, with whispering bodiless voices yapping at the female narrator.
Call her “She (who) lob,” if you like. I do. Sometimes.

The name of the game, ping pong, is an onometopoeia.
The phrase was chosen because it *sounds* like ping pong balls striking the table.
A “ping” from one side, a “pong” from the other.

Sound therefore being important, the structure of “you then asia” sort of matches the rhythm of a ping pong game. It is composed of relatively *short* stanzas, like a ball being hit quickly back and forth, but of varying length, because the rhythm of table tennis (another word for ping pong) varies and ebbs and flows.

The first stanza includes the serve, which begins play.
sip-PING.

The first sentence ends with the letter P: “...shut uP,” another representation of a serve. As does the last sentence: “Keep it uP.” The game is therefore still going on, like a neverending story, an eternal flame that refuses to be extinguished.

The first stanza also describes right away the nature of gameplay, providing a linguistic representation of the request-response flow of ping-pong with sentences two through five.

Ping?	Pong!
“Their crying?”	“Incessant.”
“Their shrieking?”	“Inescapable.”
“Do you love (me)?”	<i>Always.</i>
“Do you love (me)?”	<i>Helplessly.</i>

Alliteration is the conspicuous repetition of consonants/sounds for reasons of meaning. The name assigned to the syndrome in “you then asia”, and the phrases that repeat like refrains in a song, all feature Ps prominently.

¹ Tangentially, “Peek uP IT” is another, different way of requesting service

idioPathic Post-mortem Persistence
she Persists. they Persist. we Persist.
keeP it uP.

Boxing is a sport, alluded to by “uvulas thrashing like Punching Bags.”
Like “P—-ing Ba(ll)s.”

The real reason for the “death of death” in the story is not overtly explained.
“For some reason” the narrator can hear the bodiless crying out constantly while others cannot.
It is about empathy. The narrator is an empath. Pure of heart (the problem is a heart problem,
as shown by the death of Dennis Colvin, which is the final death and therefore the death of
death, via a *heart* attack), she sees God, and hears God, in others.

If an empathic reader reads, “for some reason,” and does not find an overt description of that
reason in the story, whether they are consciously aware of it or not, they start digging for
answers in the subtext, the underneath, which is always there. Empaths are *intensely curious*.
Especially when it comes to the pain of other people.

The narrator hears and sees *love* in others, and therefore pays attention to their *pain*.
Because she empathizes with the suffering of people caught in-between life and death, she can
therefore hear them expressing their pain, even if the way in which they do so is not visible to
others less sensitive to emotion. Most modern cultures apply social pressure to prevent people
from openly emoting and “bothering” everyone else with their stuff.

In Buddhist legend, a goddess known as Kwan Yin represents a specific form of the bodhisattva
ideal: someone intent on effecting the liberation of everyone, who defers their own personal
nirvana in order to achieve this larger end, the end of all suffering, everywhere.

Kwan Yin is known as “She who *hears the cries* of the world.”



Kwan Yin

striking a couple of poses for which she is known by her many followers and admirers.

Jesus Christ says, more than once, “let him (or her) who has ears, hear.”

Why does Christ say this? If he is speaking verbally, doesn’t everyone in his audience who can hear the words have ears?

Why is it an ear that is cut off by a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane?

It is not what you are hearing.

It is what you are listening for.

Do you listen selflessly for the bleating of lost lambs?

Or are you tuning into the world merely for personal advantage? Or judging what you hear? Cutting off an ear leaves someone with only a single ear with which to hear. No distracting input comes from a potentially problematic one that muddles the picture, like weeds in a wheat field.

It provides *purity* of hearing.

Vision works the same. Gouge out your problematic eye, Jesus says. The “right” one. The one concerned with *unnatural* righteousness (see the Sermon on the Mount)

The real reason people are not dying in the story is Empathy Deficiency Syndrome (EDS).

People are not *burning* inside.

Light hits their eyes, and penetrates their skull, showing them the pain of other people, and it just gets trapped in that haunted house, like a fake fly in a fake ice cube at a joke shop.

Rather than setting off a fire. A conflagration. Fireworks.

Fury. Compassion. Love.

“Do *you* love?”

² public domain photo

Can you hear the *narrator's* cry for help? Do you feel anything for this person, who feels all alone with her affliction of compassion, in a world full of apparent zombies who seem not to be troubled by that same burden, a world in which we have become so inconsiderate of the feelings of others that a *nurse* would have the ignorance to say, *within earshot of the mother of a child being born under stress*, "this one has no chance"? Does that bother you? Or does it not? Do you love? These are questions the story asks.

Empathy involves careful attention and deep listening, which can mean attending at least as much and sometimes more to what is *unsaid* than what *is* said, focusing at least as much on what is avoided than what is focused on. Cries for help can be subtle, soft, and difficult to hear.

Speaking of subtle.

In the short story, "The Garden of Forking Paths," by Jorge Luis Borges, a vast mystical book is described that, via conspicuous *omission* of a specific word that is very common, not saying it even once, instead using various synonyms and other tactics to conspicuously avoid it, encodes that very word as the essence of the secret that it holds.

"a *harsh* disembodied (Latino) voice named Luis"
"you then asia"

"a *hard* day at work in the garden"
"The Leap from the Bridge is Ungainly"

Bridge. Borges. "there might be a *Way* (Path)"
"The Leap from the Bridge is Ungainly"

The "spoon tap" method.
(which option did you choose, by the way?)
(*did* you choose? did you want to?)

James. Jimmy. John. Jack. Jared.
Jorge.
Jorge Luis Borges was a "magical realist." I suppose that's me, too.

Like the book in Jorge's story, "you then asia" has secrets.
Just for instance.

The key artifacts in a ping pong game are:
a table
rackets
and a ball

In the first stanza, the narrator is sitting in her kitchen sipping lukewarm tea.
She is sitting, but no explicit mention is made of a table being present.
Like the classic "elephant in the room," it is (presumably) there, just not mentioned.

The reader would have to insert the table themselves, thereby being drawn into the narrative as a co-creator, and therefore joining the narrator in telling the story, making the narrator no longer alone with the burden of the truths she knows, which is what she wants most.

This is an effect of empathy. It connects.

Empathy involves imagination: imagining being someone else (which is not the same as imagining yourself being in their situation, that's yikey) and filling in details, speculatively. "Just imagine. Picture [it]." You aren't you but *me, her*, sitting in a kitchen alone, drinking tea.

What's missing. T.

Ah, there. An *implicit* Table.

Cool. As a reader I get to play, too!

I am not being, you know, *spoonfed*.

Now, listen. Harken to..

a lunatic frenzy of voices

a tumult

a din

wailing shrieking cackling crying

uvulas thrashing

like punching bags slamming against the wood above them in a gym

thump thump thump

Do you hear the ruckus while you read?

Does it make you a bit crazy, too?

The *racket* these infernal kids are making?

Keep going.

Don't stop.

Keep it up.

a lunatic frenzy of voices

a tumult

a din

wailing shrieking cackling crying

thrashing uvulas

like punching bags

Burning Babies Birth

the

B	U	R	N	ING
	A	W	L	

"Keep it Up."

Balling
And Bawling

Play
And Sorrow
Life in a nutshell.
And the death of something.
Ashes, in an “urn.”

In baseball, a different game played on a green surface that also features wooden implements (bats instead of rackets), the acronym LOB stands for “left on base.” It represents the number of baserunners a batter has not advanced or driven home during his or her at bats.
Like a possible love affair, a seed, that didn’t fully bloom.

Shelob.
She (who was) LOB.
Someone left on base. An opportunity squandered. A road not taken.

The Kitchen.
And also the Tea.
Kitten. Tea.
Kat. Tea.
“Katie.”
Katie, Meaning “pure.” Like an infant. As in purity of heart.
She (who) lob.
A real girl who not only replied, but openly started trouble herself,
lobbing the ball over the net to me, over and over.
“Let’s play.”
Which is a less insecure and more direct way of asking “Do you love?”
Maybe the way someone falling in love for the first time,
who had not yet been hurt, might behave.

“Katie.” My Katie.
A fellow summer camp counselor with sunshine blonde hair and many freckles at Sunset Point camp in Hull, MA (which is right across the water from *World’s End* Nature Reservation), with whom I played a fateful game of ping pong long ago. My own private apocalypse.

Kitchen Tea. Kitten Tea.
K---- -a.
Ka.
The Egyptian word for “soul.”

Sunset and sunrise, the vanishing of sun and moon, are the daily apocalypses that inspired the Norse myth of Hati and Skoll in the Eddas, which tells of two wolves, one of which chases the moon around the sky, the other of which pursues the sun.

A ping pong ball is spherical, like both the sun and the moon, and also like the depiction of a period or a geometric Point.

Sunset Point.
World's End.

S P E W.

“Because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I spit you out of my mouth.”
The Book of Revelation

I was lukewarm T. Katie pursued me, and I bowed to peer pressure, allowing another counselor to inform me that she was too young for me, rather than following my heart and loving her with everything I had, which is what my heart was fairly screaming at me to do.

And like Peter in the Gospels, I suffered terribly for not following my heart after the fact. The sun that was Katie left my life, seemingly forever, when we parted on the last day of camp and I never saw her again. Paradise Lost. The fall of Lucifer. Luis. Loss. Burning. Bawling. Betty.

Be tea. Betty Traylor, alone in a kitchen...drinking *coffee* now...

Remember Betty's dream from way back when in this book?

Her baby's head rolls like a bowled Bold ball Bawl from her womb.

It's the utter terror of losing everything in a delivery room, conflated and merged and blended and mixed with the actual loss of everything in the recreation room of a summer camp, when I backed away from Katie during a ping pong game that had gotten a good bit past becoming frisky and had devolved into more like a wrestling match, and someone entered the room.

A ping pong ball falling off one side of a table is like a sunset. Or a moonset.

Katie and I were like Hati and Skoll, chasing the ball, chasing one another.

Two ferocious wolves in sheep's clothing. And then, very nearly, in less clothing.

And then the World Ended. I ended the World. I did it.

And the camp in question was, and still is, in Hull, MA.

“Hull” on earth.

“you then asia”

That's the title of the story.

Are you curious? Do you care?

Where the fuck is asia? In the story, I mean? There seems to be no mention of it.

The surname “Chen” is an Asian name, though.

(Like the name “Kim”)

(And Kimchi is a food I like)

And the narrator is in the kitchen, drinking that sorry tea.

Tea ceremonies are a big thing in some parts of Asia.

Two syllables.

Kit. Chen.

“Chen,” the Internet tells me, and might tell you, means “dawn”. Or “morning.”
The other side of sunset.
The *rising* of a sun.
And (most of the time) the setting of the moon.
Sometimes the moon hangs around for bit in the morning.
Which I always think is cool.
So we have...
Kit chen,
(a Katie-dawn),
followed by...
mo(u)rning Katie...
which, if things adhere to the natural order, would later be followed by...
Voila. Another Kitten dawn. Another possible sun in my sky, someday.
Like sunshine yellow paint, high on a wall, above a scene of clouds and earth.
Beautiful, isn’t it³.
If it’s true.
Maybe even if it isn’t.
Just like you.

In the story “Weeds,” a pregnant Amy Foster, sunshine blonde like Katie, and also Michelle Pfeiffer, gets merged with Thera, who could be played by a youngish Eartha Kitt. Both of those actresses played the character Catwoman.



Cats are grown-up Kittens.
That are born in Litters (so trash flying around is sort of like a host of angelic cats).
Maybe some cats feel like trash. I know how that feels.
Do you, love?

³ So are you, whoever IT is that you think you are.

The Lily Jack brings home to Amy, like a cat bringing home a mouse it has captured to its owner,
represents Lila.

The Hindu notion of a cosmic game of hide and seek.

The popping of bubbles and the loss of a child in Betty Traylor's tragic story is childlikely
evocative of the shattering of the vessels in Lurianic Kabbala, where vials containing god-light
(as in the story "Ends of the World") break and scatter - like the people in the story of the Tower
of Babel, or Adam and Eve from Eden, or the naked lad from Gethsemane, or Jack Underwood
leaving home - and need to return, to find themselves again, in order to, get this now, *heal the
world.*

It's a game of hide and seek, with *everything* at stake,
which is more like forget and then remember.

Who we once were, and need to be again.

Divine children.

Dressed up as if for Halloween.

Mischievous. Powerful. Crazy. Playful.

Happy. Free. The way we were created to be.

"My yoke is easy," says Jesus.

"And my burden...is light."

Katie. And her beautiful sunshine hair.



"The sky broke like an egg into full sunset and the water caught fire."

Pamela Hansford Johnson

Unspeakable Skipton

True enough.

Priscilla Reuel Tolkien, J.R.R. Tolkien's **only daughter**, was born on June 18, 1929. She was the youngest/last to be born of his four children.

Tolkien began writing *The Hobbit* sometime between 1930 and 1932 and finished the initial manuscript in 1932. Tolkien originally wrote it as a bedtime story for his kids. *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which continued the tale begun in *The Hobbit*, was written by Tolkien between 1937 and 1949. While the entire story centers around the One Ring, the title of the saga pluralizes it. "Rings."

There are, in fact, twenty rings in total, including the One Ring. Precisely three of those twenty rings are Elven Rings. Like three boys.



Smeagol, who later becomes Gollum, first meets the One Ring in *Lord of the Rings*. He calls the Ring "My **Precious**."



Louise Banks with her newborn daughter Hannah in *Arrival*.

Upon first seeing my own children, and many times thereafter when interacting with them as young people, I felt like a girl. Soft. Incredibly vulnerable. Passive to the simple, pure, unimprovable miracle that they were, not anything I wanted to control them to be.

Being a good dad, IMHO, means being kind of a bitch.

Whether Tolkien would have publicly admitted to agreeing with me or not, he clearly does, did,
always agrees.

He had three sons. And there are three Elven rings.
Elves are effeminate of feature. Literally light in the loafers.
But fierce warriors, too.
A successful blend of masculine and feminine energy.

There are four Hobbits in Lord of the Rings: Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin.
They are little people. Halflings. And all of them are sensitive males. They speak love language to
one another sometimes. They express their emotions, and sing. And they save the world, in the
end. This is masculinity done correctly. Like a child does it.

Talking is penetrative, in the sense that is described in Chinese philosophy, while listening is
feminine, allowing into oneself.

There is a time for both.

Tolkien's Christianity and Taoism both concur on this.⁴

But when you do talk, what do you say, and why are you talking, and how do you say it?
Is it sincere? Are you vulnerable? Do you share or hide your emotions?

The One Ring, "Precious," the Girl, is the undisputed Boss in Tolkien's story.
All the other rings put together cannot withstand its power.

"One Ring to rule them all,
One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all
and in the darkness bind them."

This is the heart of a person.
A Child's Heart.

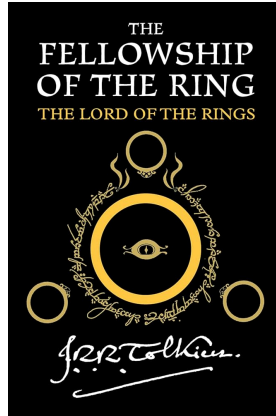
Which, regardless of anatomical gender, in early years is inherently more feminine, energy-wise,
than masculine. Knowing little, we are curious. We *take in*. We watch and we listen, carefully, as
we learn about life, and connect things, making sense of the world and our place in it. We attend
school. Learn math, and history, and science, and language. New words, new ideas, taken *into*
ourselves every day. Early on, we are tested for how well we have *retained* what *we took in*, not
our ability to contribute or add to it. That comes later.

Childhood is spongehood.
And that is feminine.

I believe one reason I felt womanly upon seeing my children for the first time is that I was quite
literally awestruck. My system was suddenly shocked back into a child-like state by being
presented with Something for which I had no analogies to mute or dilute or otherwise distract
from the experience. I simply, passively, took it in, like an inhale, like a sponge, like a vagina.

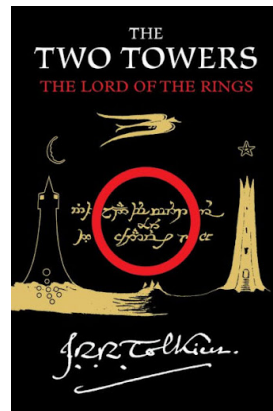
Non-judgementally. Wordlessly, but with something like "!" going in my head. Just pure,
unadulterated experience of, well, you could call it God. I do.

⁴ See Appendix at end of this document



Sex.

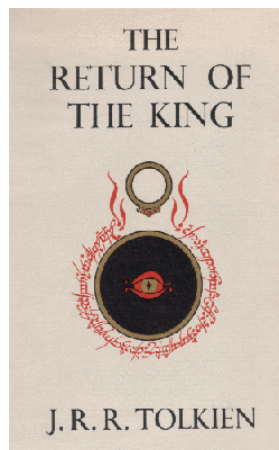
“In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit.”



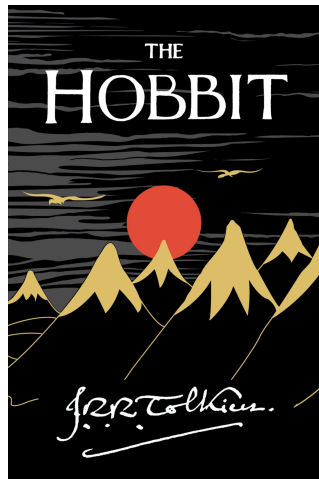
Pregnancy. One becomes two. Body changes.

“My breasts are like towers...”

Song of Songs 8:10



A child brings *childhood* back to its parents
The Kingdom of Heaven is to become *like* little children.



And Here is the King
A tiny, magically miraculous version of a woman he loves.



“...so I have become in his eyes like one who makes peace.”
Song of Songs 8:10

That is how a young child should be made to feel, *all* the time. Plus.
Now the store is fully open for business again.

At the end of *Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn, the paragon of caring, unselfish masculine strength, travels to an underworld to raise the dead, and Sam and Frodo throw the One Ring into a flaming crack in Mount Doom, as if it is being born. Then big eagles show up to save two very hot Hobbits.

“When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage.
Instead they will be like the angels in heaven.”
Mark 12:25

Like the good old days. When it was just Edith and J.R.R..

He loves his children very much, and would not trade them for anything, but still mourns the cost of parenthood to the relationship he shares with Edith.

And the toll that parenthood and adulthood in general has taken on each of them.

Consider the following alliteration.

Smeagol becomes the craven creature Gollum through his enslavement to
“the One Ring.”

Sauron, the Dark Lord, creates the One Ring.

And Saruman, another wizard, in the other tower, is corrupted by his thirst for the One Ring.

In the Book of Judges (“Judge Not!” Matthew 7:1), Samson is robbed of his natural, superhuman strength and power, rendered feeble and weak, when he is domesticated, as his never-before-cut hair is cut off by his wife, Delilah, at the behest of authorities (the Philistines).

Among other things (like seriousness and silence, and enslavement to the observation of ritual and formalities) this domestication includes, for J.R.R., a defeminization. Both British and conservative Christian culture would frown heavily on (perceived) feminine behavior from a man, and a father. To fit in, and not embarrass his children, and have the career and recognition that he wants, he feels he needs to suppress his femininity, cut his long hair and “appear” more like he is “only” male. He then loses at least partial access to the most powerful part of himself, that all-powerful Ring, the Child Heart inside of him. Women are defeminized, too, in that culture, in many ways.

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord said, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one.”

Luke 10:41-42

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ And ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

There is no commandment greater than these.”

Mark 12:30-31

“God is love.”

1 John 4:8

“What you do to others, (or to you, because you are a person, too), you do to me (God).”⁵

“Love Love with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ‘Love Love like Love.’

Mark 12:30-31

simplified

Just love, Martha. Only love. Pure love. Like looking at a newborn child. All the time.

⁵ Matthew 25:40, paraphrased

Parable of the Talents⁶

Five coins are invested. Value is doubled.

Two coins are invested. Value is doubled.

One coin is buried. Value is not doubled.

Coins have two sides.

Miracle of Loaves and fishes⁷

Five barley loaves

Two small fishes

One lad

‘But what are ‘they’ among so many?’

Male and female he created ‘them’; and blessed ‘them’,
and called ‘their’ name Adam, in the day when ‘they’ were created.

First Book⁸, Fifth Chapter, Second Verse

“Haven’t you read,” Jesus said, “that at the
beginning the Creator ‘made ‘them’ male *and* female?”⁹

Samson¹⁰



Long hair cut by Delilah
at request of the Philistines
Weak



Long hair: natural, untampered with,
untamed, strong *and* feminine
Badass

Smeagol (*The Hobbit, Lord of the Rings*)



Before becoming enslaved to the most evil talisman on earth, the ‘**One** ring,’ he is human.
But he sacrifices someone to get the **One** ring, and devolves into a craven creature called
‘Gollum.’ Which rhymes with ‘column.’ When Samson’s power is restored, there are two
columns. Like a coin with two sides. Or a person.

⁶ Matthew 25:14-30

⁷ John 6:9

⁸ Genesis

⁹ Matthew 19:4

¹⁰ Judges 14-17

And with that, we have opened an ancient can of fire-breathing worms.



The One Ring
The Lost Coin
The Mustard Seed
The Wheat Seed
The Buried Talent
Light, separated from darkness. In the Beginning.
Male and female. Yin and yang. In the beginning.
The Child of Light. And its Shadow.
The stone in front of the gateway to heaven.
The Root from which the Four Rivers in Eden diverge.

Buddhism.
The Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Islam, Judasim).
Hinduism.
Indigenous spirituality.
And all the offshoots thereof.

The Tao, meaning "Way."

The Way back to Truth and the Tree of Life.

But it's pretty much impossible to understand the teachings in the Tao te Ching and I Ching without a clear understanding of what all its children are actually saying, which in turn requires, get this, understanding they are children of the Tao. It's like a serpent made of Christmas lights, swallowing its own tail.¹¹ You gotta light all of them up to get the full effect.¹²

¹¹ Told you

¹² Don't like this shit? Don't want to hear it? Then properly distract Jesus.

Appendix

The Beginning of the End of the Beginning

There is a time for being ahead,
a time for being behind;
a time for being in motion,
a time for being at rest;
a time for being vigorous,
a time for being exhausted;
a time for being safe,
a time for being in danger.

The Master sees things as they are,
without trying to control them.
She lets them go their own way,
and resides at the center of the circle.

Tao te Ching

- 3** There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
- 2** a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- 3** a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
- 4** a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- 5** a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
- 6** a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- 7** a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
- 8** a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

Book of Ecclesiastes