

Baby Bear's Porridge

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Version 1.5 (posted on 1 November 2022)

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The title of this commentary comes from the fairy tale, "*Goldilocks and the Three Bears*," which is, at least in part, a fable perfectly suited as an object lesson and cautionary tale for our times — essentially, a warning from the Tao.

Although most readers probably remember from their childhoods the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, it's very short, so I'll reprint it here. This text version is from a web site called *DLTK-teach*. Here's a link to the story's page on that site:

https://www.dltk-teach.com/rhymes/goldilocks_story.htm

The Story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Goldilocks. She went for a walk in the forest. Pretty soon, she came upon a house. She knocked and, when no one answered, she walked right in.

At the table in the kitchen, there were three bowls of porridge. Goldilocks was hungry. She tasted the porridge from the first bowl. "*This porridge is too hot!*" she exclaimed. So, she tasted the porridge from the second bowl. "*This porridge is too cold,*" she said. So, she tasted the last bowl of porridge. "*Ahhh, this porridge is just right,*" she said happily and she ate it all up.

After she'd eaten the three bears' breakfasts, she decided she was feeling a little tired. So, she walked into the living room where she saw three chairs. Goldilocks sat in the first chair to rest. "*This chair is too big!*" she exclaimed. So she sat in the second chair. "*This chair is too big, too!*" she whined. So she tried the last and smallest chair. "*Ahhh, this chair is just right,*" she sighed. But just as she settled down into the chair to rest, it broke into pieces!

Goldilocks was very tired by this time, she went upstairs to the bedroom. She lay down in the first bed, but it was too hard. Then she lay in the second bed, but it was too soft. Then she lay down in the third bed and it was just right. Goldilocks fell asleep.

As she was sleeping, the three bears came home. "*Someone's been eating my porridge,*" growled the Papa bear. "*Someone's been eating my porridge,*" said the Mama bear. "*Someone's been eating my porridge and they ate it all up!*" cried the Baby bear.

"Someone's been sitting in my chair," growled the Papa bear. "Someone's been sitting in my chair," said the Mama bear. "Someone's been sitting in my chair and they've broken it to pieces," cried the Baby bear.

They decided to look around some more and when they got upstairs to the bedroom, Papa bear growled, *"Someone's been sleeping in my bed."* *"Someone's been sleeping in my bed, too"* said the Mama bear. *"Someone's been sleeping in my bed and she's still there!"* exclaimed the Baby bear.

Just then, Goldilocks woke up. She saw the three bears. She screamed, **"Help!"** And she jumped up and ran out of the room. Goldilocks ran down the stairs, opened the door, and ran away into the forest.

She never returned to the home of the three bears.

THE END

Now, in this fairy tale, Goldilocks is presented as something of a presumptuous, narcissistic jerk. It's not clear if she knows that she has entered a bear family's home, but she doesn't seem to care whose home it is. She acts completely on impulse, and very selfishly, doing whatever she wants, without so much as a thought for the possible consequences of her actions. In this, Goldilocks may inadvertently be a perfect representative for the human species and our presumptuous domination of the natural world, especially our complete disregard for all other life-forms on the earth. We claim everything as our own, use up all the resources as we wish, and destroy much of what we touch.

The story contains many elements that could (and should) give us pause — violating the territory between bears and people, entering someone else's home uninvited, taking or using things that do not belong to us (porridge, chairs, and beds). There's a whole lot here not to be proud of from the human perspective. Still, the most subtle moral lesson buried within the fable is the goodness of balance — not too hot, not too cold; not too big, not too small; not too much, not too little; not too hard, not too soft.

These balanced opposites resonate to the ever-changing interplay of Yin and Yang in the Tao. The ends of opposites are extremes. The middles are harmonious means or medians. While the Tao does not teach that the ends (total, extreme Yin, and total, extreme Yang) are wrong or bad, it does imply that too much of one will inevitably bring a reversal as its opposite rebounds and re-asserts itself. The presumed ideal lies in moderation — some of each quality without habitually clinging to one or the other.

The lessons of the fable — that balance is good in a middle path, and that harmony is ultimately preferable to extremes — are not absolute universals. Neither truism applies at all times, nor in every situation. However, I think they probably work out to be correct and relevant quite often. Extremes within an opposition are OK for awhile, but they cannot endure forever.

That is mathematically, chemically, and even spiritually impossible. Balance will eventually be restored, because that's how life on earth works.

Modern civilization, by which I mean the industrial and technological societies that arose explosively over the past two centuries and dramatically changed the landscape of human and earthly life, seems to operate on precisely the opposite presumptions — namely, that extremes are always preferable, and that balance or moderation be damned.

The most basic expression of this in modern civilization is the fervent belief in MORE. If a little of something (anything) is good, then more of it is better. This applies to damn near everything, but two layers in our experience stand out. These layers are separate, but often connected.

One is *success*, by which I mean the recognition and reward of being seen by others as superior. So, if success in any endeavor — business, politics, love, spirituality, art, sports, etc. — is good, then more success is better. Very few people succeed at anything and then retire in their prime, gracefully stepping down or leaving the stage. No, almost everyone who succeeds attempts to compound and increase their successes, seemingly forever. Look at the Rolling Stones, still performing on concert tours in their 70s. Look at politicians — Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Nancy Pelosi — all old codgers who refuse to step down or give up their power.

Once we've enjoyed success in almost any dimension, our egos attach themselves to it and seek to increase it forever. The fact that we often cannot achieve that compounding of ever-greater success doesn't mean that we stop trying. We are habituated to the glory. People who *don't* cling to their successes and retire earlier are exceptions to the rule.

The other layer of experience is *wealth*, by which I mean money (not happiness or the pleasures of simple fulfillment). It's said that when one reaches billionaire status and joins the burgeoning ranks of membership in the Billionaire's Club, that money no longer matters. And perhaps that's technically true. Maybe money is no longer a significant motivation for most of the out-of-sight rich and uber-wealthy among us. Perhaps Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk are no longer driven to acquire more financial wealth. But for the "regular" rich folks (meaning the one-percenters) the tens or hundreds of millions of dollars in currency, property, and influence that they command is never enough. They always want more.

In fact, that's the bottom line of late-stage, predatory capitalism and the global economy. The global financial system we've built over the past 40 years revolves around capital (money) seeking to increase itself as fast as it can and as much as possible. All of the technical advances and institutional developments, from overnight 24/7 markets and instantaneous, computer-generated trades, to hedge funds and private equity firms, are dedicated to this urgent goal —

to increase and expand capital exponentially. No other factors are even considered, not health, not sanity, not peace. Money is the sole consideration, the only value that matters.

I am personally of the opinion that a working truism about the wealthy is that they want to own and control EVERYTHING. Heck, they always owned the lion's share and have increased that dramatically over the past 30 years, but I'm certain that if they could transfer 100% of the collective wealth — literally, all of it — upwards into their own coffers, bankrupting the rest of us and reducing the 99% to nothing more than penniless paupers, landless serfs, and chattel slaves, they would — in a heartbeat, a New York minute. Why? Because the monsters have won. They rule. Everything else is just lip service to keep the rubes at bay. Edward Bernays and Joseph Goebbels were right: advertising and propaganda are effective tools for mass-mind control and keeping the masses opiated and tranquil while the Monsters do their dirty work. And nowhere in the world have advertising and propaganda been used to greater effect and more stunning success than in America. It doesn't matter what your politics or spiritual beliefs are. If you live in America and run a business, you'd better not swim against that tide.

To me, this desire/assumption lies at the stinking, rotten heart of America's hatred for socialism, which is perverse, because the rich have already achieved a very successful brand of socialism for themselves, and they love it! The wealthy already own the federal, state, and city governments — they make all the rules to benefit themselves and go to great lengths to insure that "the common people" do not get what we want. And the wealthy have succeeded, both wildly and brilliantly, at this takeover. Still, they're tickled pink when the unwashed masses believe their ridiculous propaganda and rail unconsciously against socialism.

The terrible problems humanity faces as a civilization and a species have been created largely out of this "More is Better" assumption. Habitat destruction, climate disaster, overpopulation, nuclear war — all of these can be laid at the feet of the endless pursuit of More. Enough is never enough. Getting our needs met doesn't stop us from wanting more. Endlessly more. Desire among human beings is downright unquenchable. Only death stops us from wanting more, and that's where we're headed, toward mass death.

We humans have played out the horrific game of "More" so aggressively over the past two centuries that we are now collectively approaching the bitter end: self-immolation in any or all of the various ways we've grown so very excessive. Of course, the wealthy still assume that they will be immune and protected from these disasters, that their gated communities and islands in the South Pacific will shield them from harm as the rest of us die off. And they might be right about that in the short term. Ultimately, however, they're wrong. If the earth becomes uninhabitable and we all die, they will eventually go down as well.

It's already too late to cut back now. We can't stop the runaway train. All the major tipping points have been passed. The damned Titanic has already hit the iceberg. Our hubris has done us in. Now the questions are: *How many humans will survive? Will the human species suffer total extinction, or will some be left standing? If some humans remain, what will life look like after the apocalypse? Will we be able to start over with different assumptions, or will we simply head down the same road again that brought us to disaster?*

Will we ever understand that More is not necessarily Better, and that Less is sometimes Best? (I'm speaking collectively here; all along the way of our long history, as far back as we care to look, various individuals have realized those hard truths and embraced them in practice. As a species, however, we have remained both ravenous and gluttonous. The only time we've settled for less is when we can't get more, and even then we still want more.)

I don't know the answers to any of the questions posed above, and I probably won't be around to see which answers shake out in reality. I'm assuming, however, that at least some other people will. Maybe lots of them. It'd sure be nice if the answers weren't awful.