

****Yellow Brick Road***

All is one and the one is in us all
Eternal being seeking its release
Together we stand, divided we fall
So fight illusion of reality

If all's illusion, where can trust be placed
Senses and sensibilities the same
Both liars, with desires, killed in haste
Called to trust what all shows to be inane

Why fight your intuitions and desires?
Because they lead some to destructive ends?
How is it that your temples then house fires?
Force that kills some same force that warms our friends

All yellow brick roads lead to the same place
Land of Oz where curtains are commonplace

The title alludes to the main picture of Oz. It seems like a magnificent, magical, mystical place – with a road of gold leading there. But as you travel deeper and deeper into the land, you eventually come to find that it is all legerdemain. It is all façade. The seemingly mystical substance poofs away with the click of your heels. It seems surreal because it isn't real. This poem, then, focuses on the Eastern belief system. That obviously encompasses a broad range of thought – from Confucianism to Hinduism, as well as a plethora of other ideas. The main idea I focused on here is the uniquely Eastern notion of mysticism that sees reality as illusion and throws off notions of rationality and logic. I am not at all an expert on Eastern religions, so this is intended to be my response to it as I have perceived it from those I know of who ascribe to this sort of ideology.

Eastern thought seems to have a tendency towards pantheism – or all as god. Everything is part of nature, and god is in everything. We are all part of this one substance of deity. Our problem is that we are trapped in this material world and we are bogged down by everything here. We need to free ourselves of these distractions and illusion so we can realize our oneness and divinity. Our way to freedom is to denounce this illusion and free ourselves from it, often through asceticism and ritual.

But there is one obvious place where Eastern thought breaks down. I am told that my intuition, empiricism (use of my senses), logic/rationality, and my nature (desires) are all wrong – or at least severely unknowable and misguided. I sense the world around me, my intuition tells me it's real, rationality tells me this world is more likely to be real than illusion, morals seem to be objective, and my desires correspond to this world in which I live. However, Eastern thought would have me throw off all these ways of gathering data and gaining knowledge, to adhere to their ideology. But if I have thrown out all ways of gathering data and assessing the validity of an idea, on what grounds should I trust their philosophy? How can they make a truth claim that essentially annihilates any ability to assess truth, and expect me to believe it? I certainly empathize with the idea that the aforementioned ways of gathering data and coming to knowledge are flawed, and rarely/never lead to 100% certainty (which I'll get to in my "Blues Brothers" poem. But they at least provide us with a starting point and a standard for faith. Everything about this Eastern notion screams "inane!" The philosophy may be right, but there is absolutely no way to know that it is, and no reason for me to trust it.

The often ascetic nature of this worldview makes me wonder about the allure of it. It seems as though its draw stems more from a negative philosophy than a positive one. In fact, I don't see how it can really have much of a positive philosophy if it essentially abolishes truth. So did the first Eastern philosophers notice that desires lead to weakness in anger? Did they see how lust lead to heartache and brokenness? Did they see how desire lead to cruelty? Did they see that intuitions were sometimes faulty and lead to problems? Did they notice optical or other sensory illusions and recognize that empiricism couldn't lead to ultimate truth? Did they ponder moral dilemmas with seemingly no right answer? Did they recognize all of these things, then throw their hands up in the air and say that since nothing can be known with certainty – the one thing we can know is that this is all illusion? From my very brief, novice glance, that's what it feels like.

It is evident that desires often lead to pain. It is evident that intuitions and senses falter. But this more Eastern, negative philosophy comes up lacking in explanatory power, for it doesn't account for the positive. Here, I use the analogy of fire to make my point. We recognize that fire is a very terrible thing. It burns homes, makes orphans, kills families, displaces wildlife, annihilates resources, etc. Yet at the very heart of this philosophy – in temples and the like – we see fire in constant use. This destructive force is harnessed and used for the good, despite the knowledge of the bad contained within it. If those who adhere to Eastern thought could recognize the great symbol this fire truly is, perhaps they would realize that the potential for fault doesn't make something useless. It remains useful so long as we don't become careless.

The Eastern thought which makes truths and lies indistinguishable, makes all paths lead to the same place. All roads lead to heaven, or eventual perfection. But these roads don't truly lead there. Rather, they lead to Oz – a place that looks and sounds like where you want to go, but where truth is masked by curtains, where you can't know anything, and where that which is wrong with us and the world is never addressed or fixed. The lion remains fearful, the scarecrow doesn't get a heart, the tin man doesn't get a new body, and we never make it to our true home. We live in Kansas, but are allured into the illusion of Oz.

