

CODE OF THE CONQUEROR

THE JOURNEY

DESIRE IS INEVITABLE. SURRENDER IS OPTIONAL.



THE ART OF SELF-MASTERY FOR A 21ST CENTURY CONQUEROR

MARK WEEKS

Code of the Conqueror Collection

Book One: The Journey

*A 21st Century Crusade
For Self-Mastery*

Mark Weeks



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Journey of the Conqueror

Never return, never return.
Never return to the haunts of your youth.
Keep to the path, remain stern,
Even memory distorts the truth.

Never return, never return,
Never succumb to their tireless glare.
Keep to the track, always learn,
They will never meet you there.

Never return, never return,
Claim your destiny.
Cross the bridges, let them burn,
Now let your faith see.

Never return, never return,
Never become your glorious past.
Keep to your path, never adjourn,
Treat every day as your last.

Never return, never return,
Now tame your heart's desires.
Lest they burn,
Extinguish the damned fires.

Never return.
Never fall into the lion's lair.
Keep firm, remain stern,
Your life beckons, if you dare.

By Mark Weeks

Inspired by the works of Felix Dennis 1947 – 2014 English publisher, poet,
spoken-word performer and philanthropist.



**In loving memory of
Uncle Len**

1922-2018 WWII Veteran

**As stubborn as a mule.
As intelligent as a professor.
And, as courageous as a lion.**

We all need mentors to show us
their way.
Which, in return reveals our own.
I am forever grateful.

X

Author's Note

The Journey introduces you to Alex, the hapless entrepreneur and ideology behind *Code of the Conqueror*, my complete guide to personal transformation.

With inspiring ancient maxims, proverbs and aphorisms, this book provides wisdom and practical advice for everyday life. It conveys the human condition through the eyes of desire and tackles the unending complexity of change, happiness, suffering and loss. This book also offers direction on learning how to cope with anger, fear and love.

Encompassing a work of fiction, it combines both Eastern & Western self-leadership philosophies – including the teachings of Genghis Khan's chief adviser, Yelu Chucai. It also includes a brief history of the life of Genghis Khan.

The two main characters in this fictionalised account are, Alex and Yelu Bao-Zhi, who are works of my imagination. However, Yelu Chucai *was* one of Genghis Khan's top

administrators. He figured prominently in both Genghis's later life and the life of his grandson Kublai. With a little creative license and flow I have entwined the quotes of many along with the works of Buddhism, Confucianism and Stoicism. These concepts are recognised within the acknowledgement, bibliography and further reading sections in the back of the book.

Thank you for taking the time to read my work, though, before you begin, please reflect on the following thought.

'That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons of history.'
~Aldous Huxley,

writer, novelist, philosopher 1894-1963

Be different, step aside from men and become aware, that the history of one man is the history of all.

Best wishes on your journey of life.
Mark Weeks

~ Preface ~

There comes a time in life when you must confront your inner voices or be forever at their mercy. That time is now.

Whether you shall turn out to be the conqueror of your own life, or relinquish your power to another, the following pages will surely show. I already know they will amplify your inner world for better or for worse. You must confront your own personal truths. Sure, they can be delayed or ignored for a while, but eventually all will be revealed to you. You can't run away from your inner being forever. Wherever you go, you will still be there.

Allow me, Alex, to explain how I have become an authority on confronting those dreaded inner voices.

In the nine months leading to the publication of this book, an extraordinary series of events took place in my life, which finally shook me out of my self-imposed lethargy. It began during a charity trek to the Great Wall of China,

alongside a unit of Royal Marines, during which, I had a chance encounter. The adventures that followed transformed my life and revealed my inner truths in all their naked glory. Being a stubborn son of a bitch, I fought against the inevitable, but eventually, I began to take stock of my life and have somehow turned myself around. Believe me, it feels good.

Many of us reach critical points in our lives when our mental strength is tested to its limit, leaving us with little hope and a life spinning out of control. Be it through toxic relationships, dead end jobs or the grief of losing a loved one. Sometimes, dare I say, we can't even tell what sent us on a downward spiral in the first place. Yet life conspires to keep us shut in, confine us, bury us alive, and seems to place a barrier between us and others.

Could it simply be our imagination's macabre sense of humour? Do we simply accept that life will always be this way? What can free us from such captivity?

Before my chance encounter on the Great Wall, I didn't know any of the answers and, to be truthful, I still don't have them all figured out. However, I am

now making continual progress towards living a better life and, in the process, I'm helping others do the same. Before my personal transformation, I alienated so many good friends and loved ones, out of anger, lust, selfishness and pure greed. There had to be a turning point, but damned if I could find it. Oscar Wilde noted, 'Each man kills the thing he loves,' and this is pitifully true of the earlier version of me.

I had been a struggling entrepreneur up to now, hoping I could become financially independent, whilst helping others do the same. I wanted others to taste the freedom of entrepreneurship and mentally free themselves from the rat-race, as I had done as a young man. But now, in fact I had become the most tortured soul of all.

Maybe the mere possibility of getting what we have desired for years fills the human spirit with guilt and dread. This is the feeling that says, 'Why should you succeed, when others work harder, yet have less to show for their efforts?' But I had this and a head full of other excuses to explain my lack of success in later life. My fits of depression, frustration and anger finally led to the

failure of my marriage. Also, I hadn't spoken to my father for three years, but he died of cancer before I had the opportunity to make amends and it was too late. We always were stubborn men.

I refused help from anyone and simply shut myself away in my solitary home office. I submerged myself in my work, accepted online marketing projects and copywriting jobs by the dozen and drove myself hard. Surviving on pastries, cigarettes and espressos during the day, and a heady mix of brandy most nights, I convinced myself the lifestyle helped my creativity. But at forty-six, when was enough, enough? My ex-wife's accusatory words would often return to goad me, 'When are you going to get a 'proper job'?'

My overly aggressive approach to life and my stamina to work never waned. But I had begun piling on the pounds and my cute laughter lines from the past had turned into ones born of hysteria. Although my doctor warned of impending heart problems if I didn't improve my diet and change my sedentary lifestyle, I didn't take it as a wake-up call. In fact, I didn't care one way or another.

Around this time, an old friend persuaded me to join him on a charity walk. He sold it to me by saying we will do it in memory of those we had lost to cancer. With my weight ballooning and my social skills long ago flushed down the toilet, my friend didn't take long to shame me into it, and I agreed to at least make the attempt. After all, what did I have to lose, but a few kilos of blubber?

As it turned out, the decision became the turning point of my life. Through the empowering lessons that followed, I was finally able to accept that everything in my life was fuelled by one thing only—my desires.

The same is true for you, and everyone you encounter for that matter. Your desires are an inner conflict that will never be won. But to achieve fulfilment in life these internal desires must be tamed and understood. This is the starting point of the *Code of the Conqueror*. Without these essential lessons you will forever falter in your quest to both find and master your true self.

I've heard it said that no amount of reasoning is going to help a person see

the way he does not want to see. But whatever challenges you face you must see things from a different perspective, and then take decisive action. There is no other way if you truly want a better life.

Let's move on, as I have much to share.

Can you imagine getting up at dawn and seeing the sun rise whilst the rest of the world sleeps? This is how I have felt every day since my adventure, and it all began with Zhi, the most annoying man I've ever met.

Part One

Chapter I

*'I was like a sleeping man when you
came to me. I was sitting in sadness
aforetime and you roused me.'*

~ Genghis Khan

A soft warm breeze encircled the crumbling watchtower, carrying with it the faint scent of pine mixed with the fragrant smoke of the morning camp fires. As I looked out from the tower, I felt calmer than I had in months.

To my right lay Beijing and a little further, the Yellow Sea. To the left, the ever-mesmerising snake-like wall climbed towards the faded horizon, embedded within lush forests and verdant valleys, a few of which still holding the morning mist in their grasp. It was so easily a stage for camouflaged forces ready to lay siege to this fantasy land.

As I allowed the stillness of the morning to soak into me, I can vividly recall the first words the old man had spoken. I was trying in vain to read in peace and became aware of him standing over me, watching, staring. At the time I had no idea how his thoughts would impact on my existence.

'Words are things of beauty,' he said. 'Each is a magical powder that, when combined with others, creates powerful potions, transforming even the most stubborn minds with imaginations that know no limits. Yet, so many people choose to ignore such wisdom, continuing to live their lives in the grey twilight which knows neither victory, nor defeat.'

As intrusive as the stranger was, he had unknowingly stirred my imagination and also my greatest passion—the power of words. I didn't wish to be rude and simply smiled, making brief eye contact before returning my attention to my book, searching for my last sentence. The old man eased himself down onto the rock beside me and, without taking the slightest hint from my body language, continued talking in his broken English.

'Body and mind must advance as one unit, my friend,' he stated.

'What?' I asked rather more abruptly than intended.

'You too tense, you not focused.'

'That may have something to do with you jabbering on and irritating the hell out of me,' I mumbled. 'Camp breaks in fifteen and we won't stop for two hours, please excuse me,' I added a whispered, 'and give me a friggin' break,' for good measure.

Without saying another word, he lifted himself up with the aid of his cane and slowly walked away. Still irritated, I continued reading, grateful for what I saw as some well-deserved peace.

Maybe it's true, the teachers of our lives only become so when the pupil is ready to listen. And, at that moment, I was far from ready. But now, some ten days after our first encounter and in a sombre, more reflective mood, I flicked through my notebook containing the old man's words of wisdom. And, randomly read where the page fell open.

"Some people may snatch a secret from the depths of their hearts and souls that will drive them to find their true selves. But most will continue to wonder ... wish ... and dream. And then one day they will awaken with a shock to find themselves standing in the same spot where they had dreamed as young men and women. Only now, they have lost sight of their dreams and will wonder why life has come to be."

I'd scribbled notes frantically over the previous week, attempting to absorb the old man's teachings. Yes, I had been given a second opportunity, and heaven knows why he chose me, but this time I grasped it with both hands.

Looking back, it's hard to recall how he joined our unit. He seemed to appear from nowhere. Since arriving in China, we'd grown accustomed to camp followers. In general, they would help pack tents, carry out chores and, in return, tried to sell us their goods. However, no one had asked anything of

the old man, and he asked for nothing in return.

After our first run-in he ignored me completely, which was no hardship, but he spoke to others, and even claimed to be 136 years old. To be honest, the million or so wrinkles etched into his pale-yellow face, together with his movements being that of a snail, seemed to verify his laughable statement. A few in our tight-knit group mocked him, ridiculing both his stories and his white beard, which hung waspishly down to his knees. Nonetheless, he would continue to talk to those who straggled at the back of our group as we marched on relentlessly—whether they wanted to listen or not.

Although many would say I had fallen from the man I once was, yet I on the other hand, still believed there was some compassion left in this old body of mine—at least, when I chose to use it. Then again, perhaps it was simply guilt catching up with me. It was late evening with a damp drizzle chilling the early autumn air, heavy showers were on their way, the first of the rainy season. Taking pity, I offered the old man shelter. He simply nodded approval and crawled

inside my one-man tent. He didn't murmur a word of thanks or respond to my small talk.

His continuing silence was infuriating, but I felt good for my act of generosity and thought I could suffer one night of discomfort. However, he entered my tent, uninvited, for a second night and then a third. Each morning he woke me before sunrise as he crawled out. No doubt he was taking the piss out of me, but would you drag an old man from your tent and leave him outside in the pouring rain?

Anyhow, by the third morning, I'd had enough. I'd paid my dues for being abrupt during our first encounter. So, I decided to follow him and finally put an end to his free accommodation. My back was aching, my feet were sore, and my shin-splints had returned with vengeance from our forced marches. At night, I needed space to relax and spread out for a few hours. I certainly didn't want to spend my evenings being ignored or listening to an old man snoring and passing wind in his sleep.

Keeping a safe distance behind, I followed him through a few intricate

pathways of brambles until he reached a small clearing. A faint murmur of flowing water from a nearby stream broke the silence and, as the sun illuminated the early morning sky, it brought with it a chorus of birdsong. It was a truly beautiful day, and it was there I witnessed the most unbelievable transformation ever.

The old man removed several papyrus sheets from his oversized satchel and studied one in particular, before laying everything down on the ground along with his cane. Then, he closed his eyes and turned his face towards the rising sun, whilst bending his knees, pointing his toes inwards, and holding his bent arms away from his body. He reminded me of a puppet on strings.

He stayed in this position for what seemed an eternity, until he sprang into action, moving gracefully from one side to another, the movements flowing smoothly and majestically. The steady rocking on his heels and the shape and form his hands made as he glided seamlessly from one movement to another were mesmerising.

Suddenly I felt tricked, he had played purely on his weaknesses for sympathy. How could I have been so gullible? Some of the other guys had already joked he was a spy or perhaps even an assassin, who would slit our throats in the night. I'd laughed at the thought of a geriatric assassin, but seeing the sly old man move so gracefully, who knew what he was capable of doing. I wanted to run back to camp and bring someone back with me for proof. I spun, snapping several twigs, and the old man looked in my direction.

'Thought it would be you,' he said calmly. 'Which is why I choose you.'

'What!' I said in disbelief, stepping out of the brambles and into the clearing, 'I welcomed *you* into my tent.'

'We always have choice.'

'I thought the Chinese were meant to be polite, friendly people.'

'I thought westerners were rude with closed minds. One of us is correct.'

This little old man must have been the most stubborn and infuriating person

I had ever met. I clenched my fists, took a deep breath and readied myself to let off some verbal steam, all the time thinking, *don't swear, don't swear, he is just an old man, don't swear.*

'Man with clenched fist cannot think straight,' he said sharply and rattled off something in Chinese before adding, 'Your tongue is the servant not the master. It is easy to shield the outer body from poisoned arrows, but it is impossible to shield the mind from the poisoned darts that originate within itself.'

At this point, I looked deep within his eyes for the first time and was astonished how I had not recognised their glimmer before. They were like none I had ever seen. At first, they seemed filled with tears, ready to overflow. Then the tears sparkled, like the reflection of a million stars, which drew me deeper and deeper into the old man's unconscious mind, until the only things left were the unflinching, curious eyes of a child.

For the first time since meeting the old man, I gave serious thought to what he'd spoken. Yes, he'd made a valid point. I always had let my tongue run away on

its own, often making myself and those around me cringe as a result. But hey, that's the way we are in my family. We're half Irish after all and, everyone has a short fuse. I felt myself calm a little. But I still felt cheated and angry at his new-found energy and condescending attitude.

'Look,' I said, allowing a twinge of guilt soften my response, 'I don't know what game you're playing or what religion your peddling, but I can't have you in my tent anymore. It's too uncomfortable. I need my own space. Do you understand?' Maybe it was my turn to be the condescending one, but after my outburst, the sense of relief felt good.

'Yes, I do,' he said. 'I also understand there is a tendency for people to neglect their duties towards others. They think too much of their own comfort and their own desires. They forget the favours they have received from long ago and cause annoyance to others as a result. This often leads to great injustice.'

My guilt vanished in an instant, replaced by anger. Stabbing my finger at him aggressively, I let rip. 'I don't have any duties towards you. I took pity on you

and since then you've simply taken my kindness for granted. You've assumed I'll provide you with shelter for the rest of the trip. And if that's not bad enough, I follow you out here and find you're dancing around like flaming Fred Astaire.'

The old man's expression turned quizzical. He clearly didn't have a clue who Fred Astaire might be and, still irritated by the way he'd taken advantage of my generosity, I was in no mood to explain. 'So why don't you move so gracefully all the time?'

He remained silent, his attention focused purely on my finger jabbing the air in front of his face.

'Just stay out of my way and I'll stay out of yours. I won't tell anyone about your weird dancing and about you being a fraud. Just... just stop giving me so much mumbo jumbo all the bloody time, too.'

Giving a snort of disgust he turned away from my wagging finger, picked up his belongings, and said something Chinese, then added, 'Mumbo jumbo bloody time too,' which he repeated over

and over again, which started me giggling like a six-year-old.

Waiting until I stopped laughing he asked, 'What is mumbo jumbo bloody time too?'

As I smiled, my mood changed. Why does it always seem impossible to feel anger and smile at the same time? The old man returned my smile and shrugged.

'I guess what I mean is ... it's difficult to understand you and the meaning of what you say. I'm not used to having to think and question everything instantly.'

He held his tongue and started making back for camp, resuming his normal snail-like pace.

'Look, I'm sorry if I've offended you,' I said and, for once in my life, I actually meant it.

'Mumbo jumbo,' he repeated with a wicked grin and stated, 'Whatever words we utter should be chosen with care, for people will hear them and be influenced by them for good or ill. Does that make sense?'

Keeping quiet and lowering my eyes, I nodded.

'If our minds are filled with sympathy and compassion, they will be resistant to the evil words we hear. And, towards others we must not let wild words pass our lips, lest they arouse feelings of anger and hatred. For the axe forgets, but the tree always remembers.' The old man breathed heavily as we moved slowly up a steep incline, catching his breath, before adding, 'If you remember one thing only from our brief time together, let it be this: *ensure the words you speak are always words of sympathy and wisdom.*'

'Easier said than done.'

'Yes. This is why so few dare think and even fewer dare change their lives to reach complete perfection.'

'Complete perfection! That's a joke,' I laughed. 'There's no such thing as complete perfection.'

The old man suddenly stopped and rested a hand on my shoulder. 'Maybe there is no such thing as complete perfection,' he stated, 'but if we do not

strive to be the best version of ourselves, how do we know whether it exists or not.'

Now, this actually made sense and I briefly reflected on my father always telling me to try my best at whatever I do, or don't bother doing it at all.

'As infuriating as you are, I must admit you are a wise old goat.'

The old man looked puzzled at my terminology and simply nodded, adding a gentle smile.

'And you... you wise young goat. This is why I choose you.'

He didn't *choose* me, but there was no use going over old ground, so I simply grinned a little to make him feel better.

'Okay, maybe it's time for a little more honesty from you Confucius?' Don't ask me why, but the name suddenly sprung into my mind. Maybe I was stereotyping wise old Chinese men, but his appearance and demeanour fitted the name perfectly and, after all, this is my story.

The old man smiled gently, removed his hand from my shoulder, and continued the slow pace back to camp.

'Are you a monk on a mission to change the world with mumbo jumbo?'

He chuckled and answered quickly. 'No, I am neither monk nor am I seeking to change world.'

'So, what's with all the words of wisdom and prancing around in the middle of bloody nowhere?' I prodded further, growing more confident. 'You're no average peasant, that much I do know. Who exactly are you, and where the hell are you from?'

He stopped once more, and stared at me for a few seconds before proudly announcing his ancestry. I must have looked a complete imbecile as his words echoed through my mind. But I was completely dumbstruck and couldn't fathom the logic in the old man's sentences.

'My family heritage belongs to that of the Yelu family, one of the richest and most eminent families in the Liao empire. We ruled northern China centuries ago,

with iron fist,' he said proudly, but added solemnly, 'That was before being defeated by the Jin.'

I could handle that part of the story easily, his family were once rich and now he was a destitute pauper. Such is life all over the world. There's always someone ready to take that which is not rightfully theirs.

'At the hands of the Jin,' he continued, 'my ancestors were enforced to work for their empire. Which was then defeated by the Mongols, headed by the Emperor Genghis Khan. During this time, my greatest ancestor made his mark upon history. He was brilliant student, poet and masterful administrator. His name, Yelu Chucai.'

'That's an amazing tale but why mention Genghis Khan?'

'Yelu Chucai was recommended to Genghis as possible top administrator. Genghis summoned the young man and was impressed by his attitude and cleverness and offered him the position. Chucai became not only one of the Emperor's most influential advisers, but also to his sons and grandson, Kublai

Khan. Yelu Chucai paved the way for modern China.'

Until this point I had never heard of Yelu Chucai, but, of course, I had heard of Genghis Khan. He happened to be one of my father's favourite military leaders who, through brilliant and ruthless conquest, built the largest land empire in history. At its height, Genghis Khan's empire was four times the size of Alexander the Great's and twice the size of the Roman Empire. I'm not really one for history but some facts just stick.

Anyhow, as fascinating as the story was, there were still unanswered questions. If his family heritage was so rich, why was he wandering through China looking so destitute? Furthermore, how could he move so gracefully, and then turn back into a frail old man within seconds?

'You really confuse the hell out of me, Confucius. Hey maybe that's what Confucius stands for, *confusing!*'

The old man simply looked curiously at me as I laughed at my own poor joke. 'Confucius stands for Kong Fuzi,' he stated dryly. 'Westerners always make

our words sound different. My name is, Yelu Bao-Zhi. It is not Kong Fuzi.'

'Okay,' I smiled. 'I'm Alex.'

He never acknowledged my name and, come to think of it, I can't recall him ever using it.

After a few minutes silent walking, the camp appeared out of the thinning mist and our eventful morning neared its end. I was possibly going to regret the words I was about to say but was fascinated to learn more of this wise old man's past. I also wanted to know, why he was hell bent on sharing a wealth of wisdom with someone like me.

'Look, I know we didn't exactly get off on the right foot, but you must admit ... you can be a bit annoying. Anyhow, you're welcome to share my tent until we reach Beijing. All I ask in return, is that you tell me more of Yelu Chucai, and maybe even this idea of yours about complete perfection too?'

Without hesitation he calmly replied, 'I will, but stop snoring and passing wind in night.'

Chapter II

'If you have a "why", you will find the way and live with any "how".'

~ Yelu Bao-Zhi

The rest of the day passed uneventfully. Progress was good and the spirit in our unit remained upbeat. For me, there is something magical about camp life. From sleeping under the stars, to being surrounded by those who have your back and sharing stories around blazing fire pits long into the night. Real life felt like a lifetime away, and I even started enjoying the gruelling daily marches and the self-discipline required to keep moving forward, despite being wary of the tasks which lay ahead. During the trek, I made friends for life. Yet the one person who transformed my thinking and direction forever is the one person I will never lay eyes on again, Yelu Bao-Zhi, or as I prefer to call him, Zhi.

I have always been somewhat sceptical about the mysteries, myths and vagaries of life. I also find it hard trusting in others fully until I get to know them on a deep personal level. It's not that I don't

want to believe in people, I just need proof and time. And time, seemed to have become the real enemy in my life.

So how did a wandering peasant draw me into a world I never knew existed, and then combine it with valuable life lessons I would encompass every day I still lived. It's still a mystery to me. However, as I lay wrapped in my sleeping bag with thunder rolling in the distance, bringing with it the threat of more heavy showers, I made a pledge to myself to listen to Zhi. I would remain open-minded to his storytelling and try my best to absorb his wisdom.

Before he fell asleep he agreed I could join him for his morning routine, though I mentioned I would not be prancing around, he stated dryly I was too stiff mentally and physically to undertake such activity. Apparently, I still had much to learn before I could attempt his movements. I smiled to myself as I drifted to sleep, letting my old competitive spirit rise once more as I intended to prove him wrong. Surely, I could master whatever he threw at me? It had been a while since I had felt that way. I must admit, it was good to feel the old emotions flow, even though I'd only

promised to keep up with a man who'd apparently seen 136 summers!

The next morning, he woke me with a cup of tea in hand. Without pleasantries, he simply said, 'Drink, it is time to go.'

After easing myself out of the tent, taking a gulp of water from my hip flask and sprinkling a little on my face. I was ready to go. It still felt like the middle of the night and there was no other movement around camp, although there was always a guard close by.

I followed the old man as he searched for a suitable spot, which was like a military operation in itself. I was anxious to learn more about Yelu Chucai and Zhi's past but remained silent. After a fifteen-minute search, and as the sun illuminated some of the most amazing landscape in the world, he found the perfect place to stop.

Unlike the previous day, he did not undo his satchel to remove his sheets, nor

did he stand facing the rising sun. Instead he simply eased himself down onto a rock.

'What do you expect from me?' He asked.

I simply looked back blankly. Maybe it was far too early to engage my brain. I simply wanted to listen not to talk. I should have known better by then, he had the annoying habit of turning things around to pull me from my comfort zone. Secretly, I had been hoping the trek and time away from the UK would bring me a better understanding of myself. I needed to explain, the anger that erupted within me without notice, especially towards those I loved. I wanted to understand why I had to control everything and everybody around me. It always felt as though no one understood me even when I *knew* I was right. I have to admit, a whole shooting range of negative emotions gnawed away at my heart—even more than I have admitted to you so far.

Yes, I'm aware everyone has their sob stories to share and I won't hark on but, after the breakdown of my marriage I simply wanted to escape my life and

myself. This was one of the reasons why I wanted to trek across China.

Maybe all I wanted was reassurance my life would finally stand for something, and I'd be able to find the recognition and support I craved. After all, isn't that what we all want? Somehow, I needed my life to have meaning. These and a million other thoughts rumbled through my mind, yet I stood in silence, staring into the old man's sparkling eyes, unable to utter a single word. I guess it takes true courage to share your feelings, dreams and visions with another. And believe me, it's even more so when confronted with a geriatric karate kid with ancestral links back to Genghis Khan. Finally, I blurted out something about changing the way I lived my life.

Chuckling to himself he replied, 'You think to follow me, listen to me and you improve, like magic?' He quickly added, 'Life does not work that way. You must doubt everything and find your own light.'

He turned his gaze from me and squinted into the early morning sun. My heart beat a little faster, I wanted to scream out the anguish I'd felt over the

previous few months, maybe even years. But as much as I tried to engage my mouth nothing emerged. We remained silent for minutes.

'We talk another day when you know exactly what you want of me.'

'I don't want *anything* from you.'

'So *why* say you want me share knowledge one day and then act dumb? The trouble with too many people is they believe they want change, they believe they have to change, yet they will never take action needed to change. Why? Because pain is easier to live with than the anticipated pain of change. Only when pain is absolute torture will people change.' Zhi turned his head from the sun giving me a cold stare I had never seen him do before.

'Why the hell do you have to be so infuriating? Why does everything have to be questioned all the time? I was hoping to simply listen to you speak of this relative you claimed advised Genghis Khan and maybe learn a little. It was meant to be a way of breaking up the day, not reliving the bloody Spanish Inquisition.'

Zhi returned his glance towards the sun and gently closed his eyes, he then calmly stated, 'Everything in life must start with a why. If you have no why, there is no reason for living. If you have a *why*, you will find *the way* and live with any *how*.'

His words pierced my heart like arrows, and again, I fell silent.

'So many are stuck in mud, crying out to be comforted in hope of sharing mutual unhappiness,' he continued. 'They simply hunt for others to share their misfortune, dragging them into mud, also. They cling helplessly to one another in hope of freedom, but both end up drowning in their own self-pity.'

'Okay, okay, I get it. Give me a flipping break. If you must know the truth, it's because ...' I felt uncomfortable admitting my weaknesses in front of anyone. I never admit them fully to myself let alone to strangers, but I had nothing to lose. I took a deep breath and finished what had been welling up within me for months, letting a flood of emotions pull at my heart. 'I've pushed away too many people I've loved, now I'm

in danger of losing myself. I need to strip myself down mentally and return to me. Yeah, the old me who people used to like and respect. I need to rediscover where the hell I begin and where the world told me to begin.' I turned away from Zhi and looked down the hillside, taking in the ever-mesmerising wall snaking its way across the hills. After a couple of seconds, I resumed spewing out my thoughts. 'I don't want to lie on my deathbed and discover I've never known myself. I need to unlearn all the stuff that made me angry, all the stuff that makes me feel jealous and insecure.' I paused again before adding solemnly, 'I have no choice ... I must change.'

I wiped a tear from the corner of my eye and glanced at the old man, he nodded gently without a shred of emotion and stood with the aid of his cane. He moved a few paces in front of me, turned, and bowed his head towards me. As our eyes met once more, a faint half-smile stretched his lips, as though silently saying, 'That is all I wanted to know.'

After a moment, he began speaking firmly. 'Yelu Chucai appeared in Genghis Khan's life when needed. He was dedicated to his new master and believed

Genghis had been chosen by Heaven. It therefore followed, Chucai's heaven-directed role was to help the Great Khan transform from barbarian warlord to Universal Emperor. Chucai wrote in his personal records that he wished to make, "Our Sovereign Genghis tread loftily in the footsteps of the ancient worthies." And this he achieved.'

I listened intently to the old man and still trembled slightly from the outpouring of my emotions. Then, with the tip of his cane, he quickly drew two large triangles in the dirt. At, each point he added a Chinese character along with an English letter.

'I believe,' Zhi said with authority, 'I have chosen you because you too are in need of guidance at this critical point in your life. Your words dictate what I have known since I first looked into your soul.'

I remained quiet and was intrigued by the symbols he'd scratched into the earth. He continued talking, but somehow something was different about him, he stood a little taller, his voice became a little sterner.

'Change,' he said, 'is one of the biggest illusions of life. Everyone is willing to change their clothes, their homes, their partners, even their hairstyles, but few are willing to change themselves. If anything, these people wish the world would change to accommodate their needs. But the world is hard master to tame. It is far easier to cultivate your mind to withstand thousand battles within it, for there is nothing in the world that is not created by the mind.'

'But how can I possibly control what I already am?' It seemed a logical question at the time. Short of a brain transplant, how else could I stop myself pressing the self-destruct button?

'It is true,' he replied immediately. 'Your mind, which creates its surroundings, is never free of memories, fears or laments from the past. Because they have arisen out of ignorance and greed, they will remain always within. Only by—'

'Yes, but how?' I interrupted impatiently.

The old man gave me the cold stare for interrupting him and, raising his cane level with my heart, continued once more. 'Only by self-mastery will you ever free your mind. Your past has led to an unenlightened and bewildered mind, born out of its world of delusion. When you learn there is no world of delusion outside the mind, clarity will come to you.' He stopped pointing the cane towards me and settled it upon one of the triangle symbols in the dirt. 'Only then will you cease to create impure surroundings and find your source of enlightenment.'

Zhi stopped talking for a few seconds apparently to allow my thoughts to catch up with his wisdom. When he was sure I was up to speed, he made the most amazing statement. 'Only in this way of true enlightenment will you realise the world of life and death is created by the mind, is in bondage to the mind, and is ruled by the mind. The mind is master of every situation. Therefore, the world of suffering is only brought about by the deluded mortal mind.' Once again, he fixed me with his crystal glare and asked. 'Does this make sense?'

Letting him continue, I simply nodded, though not fully understanding.

'So,' he said firmly, 'all things are controlled and created by the mind. There is no other way. It then follows naturally that the wheels follow the ox that draws the cart, so suffering follows the person who speaks and acts with impure mind. But, if man speaks and acts with good intent, happiness follows him as does his shadow.'

'Okay, so all I have to do is act nice and the world will give me all I want? Don't you think that's a bit wishy washy and heading towards mumbo jumbo land again?' I asked in all sincerity.

'Such thinking has led you this far in life ... are you happy?'

I shook my head, sheepishly.

'If you keep doing what you are doing, you will keep receiving what you already have,' he responded dryly.

Talk about state the obvious, but sometimes it takes a wise 136-year-old to draw your attention to these simple facts of life. It felt as though I was finally

waking from a deep slumber—one that had lasted for nearly nine years.

'To this point,' Zhi declared, 'you have been willing to change everything except yourself but change you must. Either I help open your eyes or time will, and this I can promise ... time will not be so gentle.'

An ominous note sharpened his voice and I took a short gulp in response. For the first time, I truly reflected on my mind actually being capable of changing my future. That is, if I could control what I allowed to enter it.

The old man's pale grey eyes sparkled brightly in the morning sun and, as I returned his gaze, he added, 'First realise you are in prison, only then can you plot your escape.'

I was enthralled and felt ready to rally every ounce of energy I could muster to break myself free of my self-imposed jailhouse. And though there were many questions left unanswered, I was confident I had nothing to lose. I gave him a big smile and felt content in the silence that grew between us. For once I took the lead and bowed. He returned the

bow, smiled gently and, with the aid of his cane, drew my attention back to the two triangles.

'Man's whole being is created upon the Six Great Desires of life.' As he spoke, he scrawled another Chinese character on the points of the first triangle. 'Every solitary soul is fighting their own battle of life against these desires. Many will be broken by them, their spirits full of regret and pity, content only to blame others for their poor judgement of life.'

He then pointed his bony index finger at my heart and, with an air of mystery, stated, 'Very few people have hearts of conquerors, those that do will eventually unlock the secret code and conquer the battle of life.'

'What code? Tell me more,' I said, excitement speeding my words. 'Is this what Yelu Chucai taught Genghis?'

The old man nodded. 'These are his principles and teachings, which my family have refined over years of witnessing the destructive nature of man.'

'So how did this Yelu become so wise? Was he a monk?'

'Yelu Chucai was indeed very wise man. He spent three years cut off from society as disciple of the revered monk Wansong. During this time, he immersed himself in the classics, which included ancient works on warfare, administration and leadership.'

Zhi's words had set my imagination on fire. Before my very eyes stood the distant relative of someone who had guided the great Genghis Khan on warfare and leadership. Although it felt kind of primitive, something magical and profound urged my senses to explore more.

I could sense Zhi was enjoying himself too, as he continued in an upbeat tone. 'When Genghis rose to power a new Daoist sect, known as, Quanzhen - Complete Perfection had arisen. It promoted the belief shared by both Chucai and his spiritual master, Wansong.'

'I'm glad we're back to this complete perfection stuff. Late into the night I was thinking how reaching complete perfection is the Holy Grail. Millions are

willing to spend everything they have to obtain it.'

'Yes', Zhi said, nodding sagely. 'Many in west believe complete perfection is having all the materialistic things their hard-earned money can bring into their life. When they have no money, they borrow to buy even more things they can live without. This is illusion and centre of much unhappiness. One must look within not without.'

As if struck by a new thought, he added a Chinese character to the second triangle and refocused his attention upon me. 'Quanzhen promoted the belief that, at heart, the three teachings of Buddha, Kong Fuzi and Daoism were all one. Chucai recommended this sect to Genghis, and I firmly believe Genghis was intrigued to find such eminent teachers supporting his own beliefs, which included the old nomadic virtues of austerity and generosity. Genghis understood these virtues to be more effective than brutality to win the support and loyalty of one's people.'

Zhi took a long pause, presumably to give his next statement the impact he felt it deserved. 'Chucai was eager young

man, yet also patient in his timings with the Great Khan. For example, he advised him that only political unity can bring lasting end to wars. And good rule must begin in the heart and mind of the ruler. These were the times Genghis advanced into the heart of China and was reliant purely on force. Chucai would also have added more ancient classics to his teachings, such as Sun Zi's Art of War, the Yi Jing and the Dao De Jing, which also fascinated the Great Khan.'

I was so ignorant of this history, it left me a little dumbstruck. It was evident I was listening to a true scholar. I should have shown him greater respect in the first instance, instead of being my usual flippant, argumentative and aggressive self.

'I had no idea Genghis Khan was so well educated.'

'He was not,' replied the old man. 'He was illiterate, but within him lay deep intellectual curiosity and desire to become truly great leader. These were inspired by his success, which he believed was achieved with the support of heaven.'

Although I could sense Zhi starting to wane, I didn't want to interrupt his flow or make the offer to return back to camp. He appeared far too proud not to finish what he had started.

'It has always been the way,' he continued. 'Men of superior minds such as Genghis, busy themselves first in getting to the roots of things and, when successful, the true course opens up to them.'

He returned his focus to the triangles, 'Before you, lies the first course in self-mastery, which is centred upon the six great desires that impact our lives every day.' He pointed to the tips of each triangle. 'If you are looking for new thoughts you are two thousand years too late. Everything has been said and answered million times before, and you ... you already have answers too. Everyone does. But, more often than not, ignorance, lack of discipline and incorrect thinking becomes conqueror.'

For the first time, Zhi named each point of the triangles in quick succession, leaving me a little dazed. He then scrapped his right foot over the English letters of each triangle, making them

completely illegible. After a moment's silence, Zhi looked at me and insisted I repeat what each point represented.

I surprised myself as I recalled the words and said with a degree of confidence, 'The first triangle consisted of **Power, Relationships and Lust**. The second was **Action, Knowledge and Energy**.'

He smiled gently and praised my recollection. 'Maybe you do listen to me, my friend.'

'Yes,' I laughed. 'Maybe you can teach an old dog new tricks after all.'

The old man looked blankly at me and then as if to understand my logic replied, 'The conquerors of today's new world are those who do not lose their childish hearts. It takes great courage to return to childish heart, and you have it in you. You too, can conquer your inner world.'

I sensed Zhi's logic and took his words as a compliment. I guess some might take being told they had a child's heart as an insult to their intellect. But, if they were to reflect upon their greatest

moments in life, they would see the compliment in the words. As children, we are able to absorb information and knowledge in a blink of an eye, yet still have time to play freely, without guilt and fear.

'Thank you. So, what's next?'

'The laundry,' he said dryly.

Zhi smiled at my new-found enthusiasm for life I assumed, but he didn't hesitate to bring an end to the day's teachings. Although a little deflated for an instant, on reflection I realised how much ground we had covered.

We made our way back to camp peacefully. I tried my best to refrain from asking any more questions whilst contemplating the old man's wisdom. Maybe I could set myself free using his teachings. After all, if everything I needed to know was already within me, how difficult could it be?

For the first time ever, a true sense of calmness flowed over me as I repeated his words over and over in my head:

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'You too, can conquer your inner world.'

Chapter III

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The Lessons

*'He who can be alone, and rest alone is
never weary of his great work. He can
live in joy when master of himself, by the
edge of the forest of desires.'*

~ Yelu Bao-Zhi

Lesson #1

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Power

*'Learning the game of power requires
a different perspective. There must be
shift in your everyday face.'*

~ Yelu Bao-Zhi

Early the next morning I awoke before the old man stirred and started to create a list of questions in my mind, ready for the first of the Great Desires. As daylight broke, I fumbled in the side of my rucksack for my notebook and pen. Without some form of note taking I knew I would lose many of his words of wisdom. As I readied myself to cough to try and disturb his peaceful slumber, he opened his eyes. Glancing in my direction, he nodded gently, then turned onto his belly and crawled from the tent.

Fortunately, like me, Zhi was not a man of many words in the morning. He readied the small stove and brewed the tea in silence. I still contemplated what I was to ask and flicked through my notebook to find a clean page.

The old man poured the tea, and chuckled as he passed me my steaming cup.

'You ready for school now?' he said, revealing a semi-toothless smile.

'Let's say, I'm better prepared than the past few days.'

Zhi, aware of others still asleep, draped his satchel over his shoulder, picked up his cane and pointed it in the direction he wished us to travel. As we left the perimeter of the camp he began his lesson.

'It is good to be prepared. And for the young mind, which cannot hold learnt knowledge quickly, notes are important method. For man, however, whose progress is infinite, it is disgrace to himself to chase after choice extracts and sayings. He should create such sayings,

not memorise them. What is your opinion?'

A little flabbergasted I thought for a few seconds before answering. 'But how do I start forming my own opinion on things I know so little about?'

'This is true. We must all start our journey from somewhere. But look at you. You are no young goat. The other day ... I lied.'

Taken aback again, I immediately muttered, 'I'm less than half *your* age.' And followed up quickly with, 'What do you mean?'

The old man spotting a break in the brambles motioned towards it. 'The words of others are merely safeguarding their own thoughts. Knowing, however, means making everything your own. It means self-reliance on your personal truths, not all time looking for the wisdom of the master.'

Zhi gestured we had found the perfect spot to stop. Although not as picture perfect as on previous days, the stillness of the forest and sweet smell of pine and fruit bushes were intoxicating.

He set his satchel and cane on the sandy ground and stood in silence. He then lifted his head towards the early morning grey sky and inhaled through his nose, keeping his lips sealed.

I stood about three feet in front of him, mirroring his posture and breathing. He never signalled me to, I simply felt the urge to give it a try. A half-smile formed on his lips as he gently closed his eyes.

'Let there be difference between your book and yourself,' he said, keeping his eyes firmly shut.

'Okay,' I mumbled.

'So, how long will you stay learner? From now on be teacher as well.'

I liked the idea of being a teacher and had always wanted to be one when I was younger. But nowadays, I find kids infuriating.

'Close eyes, stay quiet, empty your mind.'

Smiling to myself I tried to do as he commanded. But, every twenty to thirty seconds my eyes opened, and my brain

would not quit thinking nonsense. From the words the old man had spoken, to the route we had taken, it was a constant stream of babble. I recalled eating dinner the previous night and taking a few pictures of the magnificent sunset. I swear, I even heard the last conversation my old headmaster had with me, telling me I will be a millionaire one day or be in prison. I told him, 'I'm gonna' do both!' I always was a rebel to figures of authority. Now, here I was in the middle of nowhere, at sunrise and being told to be quiet, by a mysterious old man, who seemed hellbent on sharing his wisdom with me.

It felt like half-an-hour, before Zhi gave the command to open my eyes and take a seat on the dusty earth. Much to my chagrin, the old man smoothly went from a standing position to sitting cross-legged in a blink of an eye. I tried, nearly stumbling onto him and fell backwards. Laughing, he said, 'Maybe that is lesson for another day.'

Once more I mirrored his pose and settled in the most uncomfortable cross-legged position ever.

'How the hell could you stand there so relaxed? My brain never stopped chattering.' I questioned.

'Does it?'

'I couldn't stop thinking. Most of it rubbish, too.' I smiled.

'Taking ownership of your mind is the most important step you will ever undertake. You must enter into the silence every day you have breath in your body.'

'Has the lesson on Power started?' I added, changing the subject completely.

'It started before I was awake. When you were readying yourself with your book, hesitant to waken an old man.'

'How do you know if you were asleep?' I challenged.

The old man merely raised his grey eyebrows and, slowly shook his head in amusement.

'Jeez, I can't get anything past you,' I mused. 'But, I still don't understand how

I can be all-knowing and create my own wisdom, without copying the wise?'

'Yes, you do not understand. One must stand on the shoulders of the wise. First, to learn from history and stop making same mistakes. Second, to look into your future, correct your mistakes and find own path.'

'Okay, but what does this have to do with actual power?'

'Each of us is too quick to notice how others can be manipulated, but rarely do we appreciate how we are equally under the influence and control of other people's powerplays, and overt plans.'

'So, my trying subtly to wake you was manipulation?'

'Of course.' He nodded.

'That's a little dramatic, hey?'

'People will wish to bend us unwittingly to their ideals, no matter how *dramatic* or not they appear to be. It is human nature to want others to do more for us.'

Reflecting on his thoughts for a moment, I added something which surprised even me. 'Do you mean, that the steady stream of noise from the media and other people is manipulating us? And, even the words of the wise are directed by doctrines that do little for the individual, but rather raise the storyteller to new and unimaginable heights?'

'Much of what we hear can be considered manipulation. As battle is forever being fought for ownership of our minds. But still, you must use old paths, they are safe and steady. If you find path that makes shortcut, and is smooth to travel, open up pathway to others. Share it.'

'That does make sense, when you say it like that.'

Zhi nodded and quickly added. 'Great men, who have made discoveries before us are not our masters, but our guides. Yet, desire for power lies dormant in every man's heart. No one will ever say they want less power. They may want less responsibility, but never less power.'

'I remember too many times in my life when I felt powerless, it was

unbearable. It made me feel miserable and worthless.'

'Now, say you had power thrust upon you, would you use it to inflict such miseries on others, or would you make a stand? Would you be the leader you believe others should be? Or would you be seduced like many who neglect their previous compassion?'

'They're tough questions. I guess ... I'd definitely inflict miseries on my ex-wife's boyfriend,' I joked, adding a disarming smile. 'But, on the whole I would hope to become a better man. It should be easier with all the wealth.'

'It would not be so simple. It is too easy to become power hungry and turn cheek to your old values when there is opportunity to rise above others. And, sitting here in wilderness, we can all play good guy.'

'You have a low opinion of men, or is it just me?'

'Ah. The desire for power is the worst disease to ever afflict the human mind. As rust grows on iron and destroys

it, so evil grows in the mind of man who desires power above all things, and this, in turn, destroys him.'

The wind whistled through the trees, sending a slight shiver through me. It was going to be another damp day. I looked up at the gathering clouds and Zhi sensed my thoughts.

'Yes, we should head back.' He said calmly.

I readied myself to stand, even though I could no longer feel my legs. 'I'm sure the Great Khan would have used every ounce of power at his disposal to rule his Empire?'

'Without doubt he could be ferocious to his enemies. But, he also had sense of fairness for his own people. For them he created code of law, The Yassa. These were combination of his own will and the most expedient of tribal customs, which he continued to refine. I firmly believe, Yelu Chucai, had by then introduced Genghis to the teachings of Sun Tzu, who had written, "You do not create opportunities by fighting for them. The use of force without strategy is wasted effort." This would not have been lost on

the Great Khan, as the hordes of Mongols had lived too long governed only by tough tribal custom.'

'So, how should us mere mortals handle power?'

Before Zhi answered, he lifted his arms above his head to stretch. Then in one swift movement, he lowered his arms and simultaneously raised himself up from his cross-legged position. I tried the same action, but failed miserably. The old man held out his hand and helped me up. How times change. Trying my best to equal his kindness, I handed him his satchel and cane.

As we hiked back to camp, Zhi continued. 'The power to command has only one true advantage. It offers the power to do greater good. In my lifetime, I believe it is weakness to control the minds of others. Let them be. They will find their way and you will find yours.'

'Not many people think like you.'

'True. But, there will also be times in life where you must be equally as cunning as fox. Any man who tries to be good all

the time will come to ruin, as he lives among the great number who are not good.'

'Come to ruin! Is that what happened to you?' I said, without giving too much thought to my words.

Zhi remained silent. I could sense a little discomfort in his manner, I wanted to probe further, but didn't want to find a chink in his armour.

'All men cling to power for the freedom it evokes. All men hate servitude.' Zhi's words were barely audible, and I asked him to repeat them.

Ignoring me completely he went off on a tangent. 'If man sets his heart on benevolence, he will become free from evil.'

I nodded and carried on walking. I could tell the old man was feeling sombre, but didn't intrude further and, with the camp insight, I thought it best to wait until later before asking any more questions. Though, much to my surprise as we entered camp, Zhi continued the conversation, oblivious to the people

around us, preparing breakfast and packing their tents.

'When you meet someone better than yourself, turn your thoughts to become his equal. When you meet someone not as good as you are, look within and examine your own self.'

After a few 'good morning' distractions from friends, I recollected my thoughts. 'I guess, we must play many roles in life to be truly free.'

It wasn't so much a question than an observation, but Zhi turned to me and quickly said, 'Yes, every man must play the lover, the joker, the husband, the father and the conqueror. Yet, every man eventually returns to his own truth, and no one can deny him his truth. This is where his power resides.'

'Wow. This is pretty deep stuff. You've really opened my eyes to a new way of thinking.'

'You already know what I say, yet you always chose to ignore it, letting routine dictate terms for your freedom. Remember, routine is your prison.' Then

he repeated once more, 'Power evokes freedom and must be clung to.'

'I'm confused again, Zhi. I thought we were against the use of power. I thought it was an evil desire?'

Zhi smiled, as a few drops of rain landed on his brow. 'Yin and Yang. Everything in life has dark side and light side. Everything in life is built upon order and chaos. And, for learning the truth of power one must form different perspectives, too. There must be shift in your everyday face. It will take years of effort and great skill to mask your inner thoughts. You must not succumb to the mind games of others.'

Goosebumps ran up my spine as we reached my tent. I told the old man I would prepare breakfast, if he could set up the hording.

He agreed readily and added, 'It was written by the Buddha, that to conquer oneself is greater victory than to conquer thousands in battle.'

And, with that, our morning lesson seemed to have ended.

When Zhi finished breakfast, he made his way to the rear of the group and continued the day in his usual manner. I, on the other hand wrote frantically in my notebook, recollecting his thoughts and adding a few of my own.

It turned out to be a damp miserable day. Even a 'Wonder of the World' begins to look dreary in the rain. We did, however, have the luxury of a warming shower at a hostel, set up purely for travellers, which seemed to magically revive the spirits of everyone.

After our evening meal, which we always took as a group, a few headed to a local village. Some, though, hung around and caught up on the day. There were days I would join in the banter, but recently I had formed a laser-like focus on Zhi's every word. So, making my excuses, I left.

Zhi had already prepared our small camp fire, as he had a habit of doing and, as I approached, the kettle whistled, ready for tea. I nodded to him and

instantly saw his face was far more relaxed than earlier.

'Can we continue talking about power?' I asked.

'Yes.'

I settled down next to the old man and poured our tea. 'Are you happy?'

The old man looked blankly at me before responding. 'Every being must strive to find happiness in the mundane, for that is where the treasure trove is hidden. When found, it will deliver more wealth than power alone ever will.'

It didn't quite answer my question, but I guess it was a start.

'You said this morning, that to learn the truth of power one must have a different perspective and put on a different face. What exactly did you mean?'

He took a sip of tea and mulled over his thoughts for a moment or two. 'The keys to human behaviour are habit and imagination, and they are far more

powerful than logic and willpower will ever be.'

'I totally agree. I've often had to write articles about habit versus willpower. And sadly, succumbed to habit more often than not in real life.' I grinned.

Zhi nodded, as if understanding. 'People will try to use your self-interest and vanity to fuel their own secret desire for power. They will engage your senses with false flattery, gifts and tender words. These will ignite your imagination. Be aware of others' hidden needs before accepting their ideals.'

After a pause for another sip, he continued. 'People have a sixth sense for real weakness in others. Your kindness for some will appear as glorified lack of strength. And if in first encounter, you are quick to compromise, back down and retreat, you will be demonstrating perceived weakness. This will bring out the hungry wolf, even in people who are not bloodthirsty. Perceptions, remain everything, and once you show such character you will be punished without mercy. It will be difficult to regain equal relationships.'

Zhi had a point. Recalling our first encounter, when I took his kindness and demeanour as a lack of strength, a pang of guilt tightened my stomach.

'Let me explain this way. There is nothing odd about deer disliking the powerful wolf, but that is no reason to hold it against a hungry pack of wolves, as they maul a young defenceless deer. And, when the deer whisper among themselves, "These wolves are evil and vicious, so does this not give us right to say whatever is the opposite of wolf must be good?" There is nothing wrong with such argument, although the hungry wolves will not comprehend. They will say cheerfully, "We have nothing against these good deer. We love them. In fact, nothing tastes as wonderful as tender deer." Remember, all perceptions must be fuelled.'

The old man was enjoying himself, and the glint of the campfire made his eyes sparkle even more.

'How your mind reacts to these perceptions is what you alone have created. You are responsible. And, if you decide you must destroy an enemy who has inflicted pain upon you, keep him off

guard, by feigning friendliness rather than merely showing anger.'

This was a side I'd never seen to Zhi. He was acting like an unscrupulous warrior, and not the innocent looking sage of the previous few days. And, I was loving it.

'Allow yourself some pardonable defect, also. For certain weakness at times may be the greatest evidence of strength. Do not engage in this practice often. But, when you are envied by others you will be ostracised and dismissed. Sometimes losing a battle helps you find new way to win war. So, it is far better to appease an enemy's jealousy when it is to your advantage.' A half-smile appeared on his thin lips and he nodded thoughtfully, before whispering, 'Remain patient and never hurry. Hurrying suggests lack of control over yourself and time. You must act as if you know that eventually, everything will come to you. Then, and only when the moment has reached fruition, strike fearlessly.'

Suddenly, he clapped his hands together, making me jump and breaking me from my silent contemplation. Zhi chuckled and asked for more tea.

'Do not misunderstand me,' he continued. 'The greatest victory of all is not to fight, but man's impulse to use power as destructive force cannot be ignored.'

'I guess it's an eye for an eye, and that's the way it has always been.'

'And will always be,' Zhi added. 'The conqueror of today's new world must remain brave, and be the epitome of personal virtue, living simply, sharing the suffering of ordinary people and caring for them. This is true power and leadership.'

'Maybe the meek do inherit the earth.' I laughed.

'Do not underestimate that sentence. It has been undervalued for too long. In ancient Hebrew teachings, the meek were those who knew how to wield their swords yet kept them sheathed. There is power in the meek.'

Once again, I was in awe of his knowledge, and simply nodded.

With the tip of his cane, Zhi poked the dying embers of the fire, before

standing and scrapping dust over it. 'It is time to rest.'

'Discussing power all sounds a little dark and sombre.'

'Of course, there are many obstacles to life, but one must persist in his journey, and the more persistent, the greater belief and confidence grows. This is good side of power, one for which you should strive daily.'

'That sounds more positive.' I smiled again.

'Life is always fine balance between chaos and order.' He took a deep breath and closed his eyes briefly. 'The desire for power can be harnessed by man, as he has done with other great forces of nature. For good or evil. Every conqueror who has walked the earth used the same strategy to achieve ultimate power over his mind, and the minds of others.'

'What strategy?'

'First, they knew exactly what they wanted. Second, they wanted it badly enough. Third, they confidently expected to attain it. All then, remained persistent

in obtaining their desires. And finally, they were willing to pay the price of its attainment. Often, with the blood of others.'

With that said, he crawled into the tent before I had time to reply. I made sure the cups were washed and the fire was completely out before joining him. As I lay in the darkness with my mind spinning, I was compelled to ask just one more question.

'Zhi,' I said boldly, 'have you ever killed anyone?'

I thought he was asleep and rolled over on my side. Then came the chilling answer.

'If I did, they deserved it.'

Ready for the rest of the book...

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Acknowledgements by Mark Weeks

*'If I have seen farther than others,
it is because I was standing on
the shoulders of giants.'*

~ Isaac Newton

The idea for the initial version of The Journey formed relatively quickly in my mind, but it took a whole lot longer to complete than first imagined.

And though I created the story, I have added many voices of the giants who have gone before us and inspired us through the centuries. You may recognise many of the quotes and others that have been edited and refashioned. I created the rest. That's the magic and beauty of words. With a little creativity, we can create our own style, yet the undercurrent remains. As Zhi stated, all thoughts and words have been spoken a million times before.

*'Ignorant men raise questions that wise
men answered
a thousand years ago.'
~ Goethe*

Here are many of the voices I have
echoed through the character of Yelu
Bao-Zhi, in no particular order:

Buddha	Jon Kabat-Zinn
Confucius	Mohandas
Gandhi	Napoleon Hill
Lao Tzu	Jim Rohn
Sun Tzu	Virgil
Yelu Chucai	Julius Caesar
Marcus Aurelius	Oscar Wilde
Epictetus	C.S.Lewis
Pliny the Elder	Seneca
Niccolò Machiavelli	St.Augustine
Ralph Waldo Emerson	Nikola Tesla
Friedrich Nietzsche	Emily Maroutain
Carl Gustav Jung	William Blake
Benjamin Franklin	Aristotle
Baltasar Gracian	Herbert J. Grant
Nathaniel Hawthorne	Socrates
Jordan B. Peterson	Robert Collier
Anthony de Mello	

Each of us is forever indebted to
those who have trodden the narrow
pathway before.

And on a personal note, a very special thank you to the following friends whose support and encouragement have spurred me on. My Kim, Joe Barnes, Dwayne Williams, Thibaut Meurisse, Antoine Vanner and finally, my writing mentor, editor and all-round bloody nice chap, Kerry J Donovan - Author and Editor #1 Bestselling author of the Ryan Kaine action thrillers, and the DCI Jones Casebook crime novels www.kerryjdonovan.com – here's looking at you ol' green eyes. We did it!

Bibliography and Further reading

Even a shortish book like this requires a lot of background knowledge and focus. And, the following books have inspired and helped me gather my thoughts, ones too, I feel will benefit your journey. The years highlighted are the published dates of my own personal copies and may not represent the actual date of first publication.

Genghis Khan - The Emperor of all men
by Harold Lamb 1952

The Leadership Secrets of Genghis Khan
by John Man

The Teaching of Buddha *by Bukkyo Dendo Revised Edition 1981*

Marcus Aurelius- Meditations *Translated by M.Staniforth Penguin Classics 1979*

Seneca – Letters from a Stoic *Translated by Robin Campbell Penguin Classics 2004*

The Art of Worldly Wisdom – Baltasar Gracian *Translated by Martin Fischer* 1993

The Secret of the Ages *by Robert Collier* 27th Edition 1975

The Red Book – A Reader's Edition *by C.G.Jung* 2009

The Daily Stoic *by Ryan Holiday* 2016

Change Your Thoughts Change Your Life *by Dr Wayne W. Dyer* 2007

Power *by Robert Greene* 2000

The Leadership Secrets of Genghis Khan *by John Man* 2009

12 Rules For Life *by Jordan B. Peterson* 2018

Escape The System *by Joe Barnes* 2015

Kublai Khan *by John Man* 2006

Master Your Emotions: A Practical Guide to Overcome Negativity and Better Manage Your Feelings *by Thibaut Meurisse* 2018

Also by Mark Weeks

Mum Ultrapreneur with Susan Odev

The Concise Law of Attraction - Available on Kindle

DIY Millionaire - Available on Kindle (A very short cheeky look at greed)

Coming soon...

Soul of a Dreamcatcher

Napoleon's Last Letter

Golden Sayings of Yelu Bao-Zhi

Code of the Conqueror - Evolution

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Become the conqueror of your world, visit www.urconqueror.co.uk

Code of the Conqueror – Pledge

Strive for excellence, control your desires,
discipline your mind, speak the truth
and exceed yourself.

Respect your mother & father.
Respect yourself.
Savour friendships.

These principles will help you to conquer
yourself, make you stronger, give you
hope and create the momentum for
personal greatness.

Last Word ...

*So many gods, so many creeds,
So many paths that twist and bind.
But all this sad world really needs,
Is the art of being kind.*

... thank you

Mark Weeks :)

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