

Thinking It Through 2

10 more short stories to get your brain working!



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Themes

1. **A Bird Called Peng** – seeing the bigger picture, ignoring naysayers
2. **The Broken Pot** – learning from our mistakes, finding positives from trouble
3. **The Inchworm’s Dream** – not letting fear hold you back, following dreams
4. **The Boxer’s Son** – avoiding pride, responding to bullies, family pressures
5. **The Seafarer** – taking on challenges, stepping into the unknown
6. **The Prophet’s Apprentice** – admitting uncertainty, enjoying the present, simplicity
7. **The Winemaker’s Daughter** – patience, managing anger, unexpected problems
8. **The Damkeeper** – humility, learning from difficult times, keeping an open mind
9. **The Fierce & Unruly Dog** – responding to bullies, knowing when to change course
10. **The Swimmer** – not copying others, being your own person, ambition

A Bird Called Peng



Peng was in many ways like the thousands of other birds of the countryside, growing up from a tiny egg amongst the trees and hedgerows. But unlike the other birds, Peng constantly looked up to the blue skies and wispy clouds above her, towards the heavens.

As Peng learned to fly, she spent each day flying higher and higher, her wings becoming stronger and stronger. On her return the other birds, who would only jump amongst the branches, would mock her naivety and warn her of the terrible consequences of flying too high. They did this because they didn't understand what she could see from such height.

With each generation there had been other birds who had reached for greater things. But they had listened too much to the mundane chattering of these other birds and in turn curbed their flight to become just like them. As time went by, their unused wings withered to the size of the others. Indeed it was such birds that were now the loudest in their chattering.

But this little bird Peng ignored them, she had refused to become weighed down by their ramblings, felt no need to explain, no need to justify her pursuit of the bigger picture. And so she flew, soaring higher, and closer.

The Broken Pot



A peasant in a faraway village called Chu Jen used two large pots to collect water from an ancient spring, each hung on the ends of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water.

At the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the peasant delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his home.

Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfectly suited for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to achieve only half of what the other pot could do. After two years of feeling like a bitter failure, it finally spoke to the peasant one day by the stream saying, "I am ashamed of myself because this crack in my side causes water to leak all the way back to your home."

The peasant replied to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about you, and so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to learn how to grow rare and delicate flowers to decorate our dinner table. Without you being just the way you are, I would not have witnessed such wonders."

The Inchworm's Dream



The inchworm Chu, sleeping in the heat of the midday amongst the shade of the leaves, stirred and smiled. He woke to speak to his friend Jia, a spittlebug.

Chu explained to Jia how he had dreamt he had grown beautifully-coloured wings and was flying amongst the branches, "In my dream, I found myself flying up above the field. I looked behind me and saw that I had wings. They were large and beautiful, and they fluttered rapidly." He told how he had fluttered and fluttered them, floating off to the flowery meadows where he would have not dared to have gone previously for fear of the birds and other animals that might make him their lunch. Jia, paused for a moment, and responded, "I too once had a similar dream. This dream sounds like a wonderful experience."

Chu went on, "It was, but like all things, it had to end sooner or later. Gradually, I woke up and realized that I was just an inchworm after all. And this is what puzzles me." Jia, stared at him scornfully, "What is so puzzling about it? You had a nice idea, a fantasy, that's all there is to it." Chu replied, "But what if I am really sleeping right now? This conversation I am having with you seems real in every way, but so did my dream. What if I am really a butterfly who, at this very moment, is sleeping as an inchworm?"

"Well, I can tell you that you are in fact an inchworm and not a butterfly." And with that, Jia returned to his dreamless sleep.

The Boxer's Son



Maikeer had trained to be a Muay Thai fighter from the age of seven. His father, a prize-fighting boxer in his younger days, constantly asked the Kru if his son was ready to compete in the ring. He wanted his son to achieve the glory he never did.

The Kru kept replying with, "Not yet..." His father would sigh with frustration and reply with, "But he is full of fire... he is ready to pick a fight with any of the other young men here, he knows he can take them on." Again, the Kru replied with, "Not yet..."

A few more months passed and the father approached the Kru again, making the same argument, "He looks at himself in the mirror and can see his muscles are strong enough." Again the Kru replied, "Not yet, he flares up and loses his cool every time he steps foot in the ring to spar..."

And with that another year passed until one day the Kru approached the father, "Maikeer is nearly ready. Now when he steps in the ring, his eyes don't frown and glare, his cheeks do not redden, he stands calmly in the correct postures, he performs the Wai Kru with complete focus, he does not anger or waver."

"What does this mean?" the father asked, "It means that when other fighters look at him, they will know the most important battle is already lost."

The Seafarer



The fishermen of the northern coastline would go out to sea three times a week to provide food for their families and to sell at the markets of the mainland. They would travel as far they could outwards to the vast ocean without losing sight of their neat little houses clinging to the sides of the cliffs. Each time they would hurriedly fill their nets and return to shore.

The fishermen and their families were fortunate, believing themselves to be blessed by God. For life was always plentiful, except that is, during the times of storms. Every few decades fierce winds would pass over the area, making the seas dangerous and leaving them at risk of starvation. The fisherman and their families believed such events to be curses, telling stories to their children of how it had been this way for countless generations.

But in one generation there was a young man who took his boat further, forever losing sight of the shore. Sometimes he would return with less fish, yet look the most exhausted. The other fishermen would mock his foolishness whilst his family would pray for his safe return.

However, when the times of the storms came, the young man's sense of purpose became known. As the waves roared and crashed, he took to the seas showing great strength and resilience, catching the fish others could not catch – saving the whole village from starvation. When asked how he had come to do this, he replied with *"Sometimes to grow, we must leave the comfort of the coastline."*

The Prophet's Apprentice



A grand old prophet was passing through a town on the Silk Road on his journey eastwards. The people of the town were excited over his arrival. They gathered to pay their respects and to listen to him teach, before falling into their own heated arguments between themselves about what he actually meant.

As the sun began to set, the crowds disappeared and the grand old prophet walked towards the inn he was due to spend the night. On the way he came cross three boys arguing with each other. The grand old prophet stopped to ask what their argument was about.

The first boy said, "We are arguing about the sun. I believe that the rising sun is closer, and the midday sun is further away. The rising sun is as big as the wheel of a vehicle, and the midday sun is only the size of a dish, since an object looks bigger nearby but smaller farther away..." The grand old prophet nodded silently to show he was listening and mulling over the boy's strongly held views.

The other boy said, "I think the opposite is right: the midday sun is closer, and the morning sun is farther. It is cool and comfortable in the morning sun, and it is as hot as being soaked in hot water at noon. Don't you know that a burning object makes us feel hotter when it is closer?" Again, the grand old prophet nodded silently to show he was listening and mulling over the boy's strongly held views.

The third boy then said, nervously, "Unlike my two friends, I have to admit I really do not know for sure. All I can say for certain is the sunset looks beautiful tonight." The grand old prophet smiled and replied with, "And that, my apprentice, truly is the wisest thing I have heard spoken all day."

The Winemaker's Daughter



A young hot-headed girl was given a small patch of land by her mother, a winemaker famous throughout the land. Knowing the grapevines might live to a hundred years, just like those of her many ancestors before that, the girl was anxious to follow a set plan.

She asked her mother to provide lots of detailed instructions and she followed them very closely, preparing the soil to make sure that it drained well and planting the seedlings at exactly the right time. As the seedlings grew, she worked hard to build each one a trellis to support them, closely copying the actions of other winemakers. It seemed like everything was going as expected.

But one morning, the young girl arrived to find a thorny weed had grown amongst the vines, its spiked tentacles grasping at two of the vines. Angry at their invasion, she took a spade and used her might to smash them into pieces. A few days later she arrived to find even more weeds, this time covering half of the vines and strangling them. Again she smashed away at them in fury using up all of her energy.

A few more days passed and again the weeds re-appeared, this time covering the base of the vines completely. In tears, she ran to her mother to ask for advice, telling her all that she had done to try stop them. Her mother sat her down and explained, "By attempting to beat this problem with anger, you are helping it grow by spreading the seeds further. Think about what you need to do to stop it."

Over the coming days the young girl returned to her crop, tending carefully to the vines whilst denying the weeds any of her energy, depriving it of both water and covering it from the light. With time it shrivelled and died allowing the vines to bear great fruit. Through this she learnt a greater lesson about the effects of anger on the heart – which is of course why her mother had given her the land in the first place.

The Damkeeper



There was a large dam situated over 180 miles inland, serving the region with fresh water. The dam's most noticeable feature was a huge wall to keep the thousands and thousands of gallons of water collected from the surrounding hills at bay. And at the foot of the dam wall, at the very centre on the opposite side from the huge lake it had created, there was a small stone cottage which housed the damkeeper.

The current damkeeper had lived in the cottage for over thirty years. He knew every stream and every spillway that allowed water to flow into and out of the dam. He knew the exact times of year when the waters would rise and when they would fall. He could even talk for hours to visitors about every fish, every bird, and even every insect, that lived in and around the dam.

The damkeeper was very proud of his place in the world and his knowledge of it. When walking amongst the villages of the hills and the farms of the valleys, he was respected as a man of great importance. When he stood at the very top of one of the two tall towers situated either side of the dam, he firmly believed that the great expanse of the world was in his keeping.

Then, one Autumn day, as he sat eating his breakfast following a night of unexpected storms, there came a huge roar. One of the towers had been struck by lightning, crashing it onto the wall and cracking it wide open. A huge deluge of water swept over his house bringing down the walls. The damkeeper clung onto the table, which had now become a life-saving raft, as he was washed down the valley.

For a day and a night he clung on as the surging water propelled him through normally calm waterways, slipping in and out of consciousness. At times he caught glimpses of strange landscapes and creatures as he passed by. He finally came to the ocean and as the water calmed, he came to his senses and crawled to safety. He looked at the waves upon waves out towards the misty horizon in the east and his face fell, realising his true place in the world. The damkeeper murmured to himself, *"The old proverb has proved right, real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance."*

The Fierce & Unruly Dog



One day, a fierce and unruly dog – reared for guarding - was left tied in one of the narrow but very busy alleyways of an old market town. A crowd soon gathered, debating the best way to get around the vicious beast which had decided, for that moment at least, that the alleyway was its territory to own and to defend.

Many attempted to simply run past it but the alleyway proved too narrow, and they only received bites for their troubles. One brave young man tried to pole vault over the dog, but it simply jumped up and dragged him to the floor. Others tried to make the animal heel by alternating between offering treats and lashing out at it with kicks, again only to be rewarded with torn clothes and ripped skin.



After many hours of panic and plotting, a young girl spotted a wise old lady, a poet famed across the land, approaching the alleyway from a nearby street. This was her usual way to the market, just as it was theirs. The young girl yelled, " Pan Chou approaches! Surely she can help us get around the dog!"

Pan Chou gazed from the crowd to the dog, pausing briefly to consider her next step. She then smiled slightly, turned around and walked down towards the next alleyway further along to continue on her journey.

The Swimmer



Far out in the south eastern seas lay a dozen islands of great beauty and natural riches. The people of the islands lived a comfortable existence of fishing, fruit picking and farming. With no dramatic changes in seasons or history of calamities, the people realised they were fortunate.

Each year the islands, as a way of allowing their young people to make new friendships, would hold a series of annual games following by a huge party to celebrate their good fortune. Each island would select their strongest young men and women to take part in a variety of competitions with the overall winner hosting that year's party.

An ambitious young athlete named Lek had heard rumours that the people of a neighbouring island had developed a more elegant, faster style of swimming than the one he had mastered. So he journeyed there to learn of such things, using his great strength to swim across the 20-mile long channel that divided them.

Arriving on the shores of the nearby island, Lek set about watching his neighbours swimming in the clear surrounding waters. He indulged in this study for days and then weeks, focusing on each and every tiny detail of their style. But as the time passed, he felt more and more worried because as much as he tried, he could not master it.

Deciding to give up and return home, Lek was struck by even worse luck, for in his attempt to copy others he found himself no longer able to swim in his own way. And so he had no choice but to take a boat back to his own island. On his return, Lek resolved to follow his own path in all aspects of life and to pay less heed to the words and deeds of others.