

Lessons from *The Wizard*



**Selected Stories from
“The Way of The Wizard”
By Deepak Chopra**

Lessons from *The Way of the Wizard*, by Deepak Chopra

TEACHING OF THE WIZARD

“There is a teaching,” Merlin said, “called the way of the wizard. Have you heard of it?”

The boy Arthur looked up from building the fire, which wasn’t going well. Building a fire rarely went well on the damp mornings of early spring in the West Country.



“No, I’ve never heard of that,” Arthur said, after a moment’s consideration. “Wizards? Do you mean they do things a different way?”

“No, just the way we do,” Merlin replied. With a flick of his finger he lit the soggy heap of kindling that Arthur had gathered, having grown impatient with the boy’s clumsy attempts at fire building. A blaze leapt up on the instant. Merlin then opened his hands and produced some food out of thin air – two russet potatoes and a clutch of wild mushrooms. “Put these on skewers and roast them, if you will,” he said.

Arthur nodded matter-of-factly. He was about ten. The only person he had ever known was Merlin. They had been together for as long as he could remember. He must have had a mother, but her face didn’t register in his memory, not even dimly.

The old man with the flowing white beard had claimed his right to the royal baby only hours after it was born.

“I am the last keeper of the wizard’s way,” Merlin said. “And perhaps you will be the last to learn it.” Setting the skewers on the fire, Arthur looked over his shoulder. He was intrigued now. Merlin a wizard? It had never occurred to him. The two lived alone in the forest and the crystal cave. The glow of the cave gave them their light. Arthur had learned to swim by turning into a fish. When he wanted food, it appeared, or Merlin handed him some. Wasn’t that how it was for everyone?

“You see, you will be leaving here soon,” Merlin continued. “Mind you don’t drop that potato in the ashes.” Of course the boy already had. Because Merlin lived backward in time, his warnings inevitably came too late, after some minor disaster had already occurred. Arthur brushed the soot off the potato and replaced it on its skewer, made from the green wood of the linden tree.

“Never mind,” Merlin said. “That one can be yours.”

WHO ARE YOU?

Merlin disappeared from Arthur's world for many years; then one day he suddenly reappeared, walking out of the forest and up to Camelot. Overjoyed to see his master, King Arthur ordered a royal banquet in his honor. But Merlin acted bewildered, looking at his former pupil as if he had never seen him before.



"Perhaps I might attend, if you are who I take you to be," Merlin said. "But tell me truly, who are you?" Arthur was astonished, but before he could protest, Merlin addressed the assembled court, saying loudly, "I shall offer this bag of gold dust to anyone who can tell me who this person is." And immediately a purse bulging with pure dust of gold appeared in his hands.

Baffled and chagrined, none of the Round Table knights came forward. Then a young page ventured, "We all know this is the king." Merlin shook his head and curtly dismissed the page from the hall.

"Don't any of you know who this is?" he repeated.

"It is Arthur," another voice called out. "Even a fool knows that." Merlin spotted where the voice came from – an old serving maid in the corner - and ordered her from the room too. The whole court buzzed with confusion, but soon the wizard's challenge turned into a game.

Various answers began to fly: the son of Uther Pendragon, ruler of Camelot, sovereign of England. Merlin accepted none of them, nor the more ingenious answers, such as son of Adam, flower of Albion, a man among men, and so on. Eventually Guinevere herself was drawn in. "This is my beloved husband," she murmured. Merlin only shook his head. One by one, each person was dismissed until no one remained in the great hall but the wizard and the king.

"Merlin, you have stymied us all," Arthur admitted. "But I am sure I know who I am. Therefore my answer is this: I am your old friend and disciple." After the briefest of hesitations, Merlin dismissed this last answer as he had all the others, and the king himself had no choice but to leave. Curiosity, however, led him to an open door from which he could still see into the great hall. To his surprise, he watched Merlin walk over to a casement window, open the purse, and fling the gold dust into the air.

"Why did you throw away that precious gold?" Arthur called out, unable to contain himself.

Merlin looked up. "I had to," he replied. "The wind told me who you are."

LIVING BACKWARD IN TIME

Every story about Merlin, even the most confused, took it for granted that he lived backward in time. In his day this caused much consternation among mortals. The old wizard would shout “Watch it!” the second *after* Arthur spilled boiling water on himself. He would pop up at funerals and chuck the corpse under the chin as if it were a newborn baby. If that wasn’t strange enough, the villagers whispered that Merlin had been seen in graveyards handing out christening presents to the headstones.



“Can you explain why you live backward in time?” the boy Arthur once asked.

“Because all wizards do,” replied Merlin.

“And why is that?”

“Because we choose to. It has many advantages.”

“I don’t see any,” Arthur persisted, thinking of Merlin’s strange habits, such as eating breakfast before he went to bed.

“Here, I will show you,” Merlin said, taking Arthur outside the crystal cave. It was a hot summer day with the sun straight overhead and the wild roses drooping almost to the ground.

“Now,” Merlin said, handing the boy a shovel, “begin digging a ditch from here to there, and don’t stop until I tell you.”

Arthur pitched into his task, digging with all his might, but after an hour he was exhausted, and still Merlin had not told him to stop. “Is this long enough?” he asked. Merlin regarded the ditch, which was perhaps ten feet long and two feet deep.

“Yes, quite sufficient,” he said. “Now fill it up again.”

Accustomed as he was to obeying, Arthur did not like this order very much. Sweating and grim faced, he toiled under the blazing sun until the ditch was entirely filled again.

“Now sit beside me,” said Merlin. “What did you think of that work you did?”

“It was pointless,” Arthur blurted out.

“Exactly, and so is most human effort. But the pointlessness isn’t discovered until too late, after the work has been done. If you lived backward in time, you would have seen ditch digging as pointless and not begun in the first place.”

POEM BY THE STREAM

One day when Merlin and Arthur were both in a drowsy, summery mood lying beside a stream, Merlin said, “I read a poem as a boy, a long time in the future. I wonder if you will like it?” Arthur pretended he was asleep, covering his face with his hand to ward off the July sun. Whenever Merlin talked about the future as his past, the boy needed a good deal of concentration to follow him.



“You needn’t try to ignore me,” Merlin went on, “for this poem is too beautiful to neglect.:

“What if you slept,
And what if,
in your sleep
you dreamed?
And what if,
in your dream,
you went to heaven
and there plucked
a strange and beautiful flower?
And what if,
when you awoke,
you had the flower
in your hand?
What then?”

APHORISMS

When the doors of perception are cleansed, you will begin to see the unseen world – the wizard’s world.

Where and when have you experienced the unseen world?

There is a wellspring of life within you where you can go for cleansing and transformation.

Where is your inner well? How have you been cleansed and transformed there?

Purification consists of getting rid of the toxins in your life: toxic emotions, toxic thoughts, toxic relationships.

What are your cleansing rituals for toxic emotions, toxic thoughts, and/or toxic relationships?

ALCHEMY

After the boy Arthur left Merlin's woods, he lived with old Sir Ector and his son Kay. He was given the position of squire, but this was in name only. Arthur had no family or possessions. He couldn't afford to buy his own clothes, and no one really believed he came from a noble family. Behind Sir Ector's back the stable boys used to throw mud at him, and the maids whispered that Arthur knew black magic.



As a result Arthur spent much of his time alone. One day he was sitting on the edge of a grove of oaks staring at a battered water pitcher made of lead when Kay happened to come across him. "Did you steal that?" Kay asked suspiciously.

"No," Arthur replied, shaking his head. "I borrowed it."

"What for?"

"Alchemy."

Kay's eyes grew wide. He had heard that wizards had the power to turn base metals to gold. "You were taught alchemy?" he asked. Arthur nodded. "If you can change lead to gold," Kay said excitedly, "our family will be the richest in England. Show me."

Arthur nodded and gestured to Kay to sit beside him on the grass. Without another word he began to stare at the lead pitcher. After a moment Kay noticed that Arthur's eyes were closed. He waited impatiently, but when Arthur opened his eyes fifteen minutes later, the pitcher was unchanged.

"I think you're a fraud," Kay said hotly. "That pitcher's still made of lead."

Arthur looked unruffled. "Well, of course it is. It's just a reminder. *I'm* the one who's trying to turn to gold."

APHORISMS

The wizard is the teacher of alchemy. Alchemy is transformation.

What is the difference between transition and transformation in your life?

Through alchemy you begin the quest for perfection.

How do you define perfection? What does the quest for perfection look like for you at this moment?

You are the world. When you transform yourself, the world you live in will also be transformed.

Do you feel a personal sense of responsibility for anything larger than yourself?

ARTHUR IN LOVE

Just before he left Merlin's care, Arthur became very moody. He was nearly fifteen, and he had rarely seen other people. "Are you sad about going out among *them*?" Merlin asked. "After all, you are of their kind."

Arthur looked away. "I am sad, but that's not the reason why."

"Then what is it?"

"I want to ask you something, but I don't know how, or if I should."

"Go ahead."

Arthur looked doubtful. "It's not about any lesson you've taught me. Yet more than anything I want to know – that is, if you would tell me..." He paused, tongue-tied.

"You want to know what it is like to be in love, perhaps?"

Arthur nodded, happy to have been saved by Merlin's intuition. The old wizard thought for a moment and said, "First of all, do not be ashamed, because you've asked about a truly important thing. There is something about being in love that cannot be captured in words, but come with me."

Merlin led Arthur out into a clearing where the noon sun shone. In Merlin's hand a lighted candle appeared, which he held up against the sun. "Can you see whether it is lit or not?" he asked.

"No," said Arthur. The sun was so bright that it made the candle flame invisible.

"But look," Merlin said. He held a ball of cotton next to the candle, and it was promptly burned up.

"What does that have to do with love?" the boy asked. But Merlin didn't reply. He only took a wild gentian flower and squeezed two drops of its juice onto Arthur's fingers. "Taste," he ordered.

Arthur made a face. "It's very bitter."

Merlin led him to a lake and told him to wash his hands. "Now taste the water," he ordered. "Is any trace of bitterness there?"

"No," Arthur admitted. "But what does this have to do with love?" Again Merlin didn't reply but led the boy deeper into the forest. "Sit still," he said softly. Arthur did as he was told. After a moment a mouse crept out into the field some yards away. A shadow passed overhead, but before the mouse could move, it was snatched up by an eagle, which flew off with its prey to a nest high in the cliffs.



CHRISTMAS DAY

It was a miraculous Christmas day when Arthur pulled the sword from the stone. In all the tumultuous crowd that witnessed the deed, none was more surprised than the young Arthur himself. Where is Merlin? he thought, certain that the wizard had accomplished the feat with magic. But Merlin did not show his face.



Deep in the night, long after everyone had gone to bed, Arthur still sat up, wondering if his destiny really was to be king. “I need you, Master,” he prayed. Suddenly there was a light under the door. Arthur leapt to his feet and opened it, but the wizard hadn’t come. It was Kay, his adoptive brother.

“How are you faring?” Kay asked. Arthur did not know what to say, but as he turned back into the room, he took a sharp breath. “Hold your light higher,” he said. Kay raised his candle, and its light fell on three objects that had appeared on Arthur’s bed – a straw doll, a broken slingshot, and a cracked mirror.

“Do you see those?” Arthur asked in a strange voice. Kay looked confused. “I see them, but they mean nothing to me,” he said.

“I wished for Merlin’s help, and now these have appeared. This doll was my first toy,” said Arthur, picking it up. “I must have been two when Merlin made it for me. This broken slingshot I made from deerskin and forked willow when I was eight. This cracked mirror I found in the woods when I was twelve. Do you know what they have in common?” Kay shook his head. “They were the most important things I ever owned, each in its own time, and now look at them.”

“Worthless trash,” Kay muttered.

“Yet I am overjoyed to see them, for now I know Merlin has guided me all along. You see, Kay, when I was two I only wanted toys; when I was eight I wanted only to hunt sparrows and squirrels; and when I was twelve I only wanted to look in a mirror to see if girls would find me ugly or handsome. All these things I have put behind me, yet each one was a stepping-stone to this very moment. One day so shall I put away the crown, although it is my sole wish and destiny today.”

Kay was a simple, stout soul who revered the monarchy. He was shocked. “Why would anyone throw away the crown?” he asked in bewilderment.

THE END OF THE ROAD

It was the last day they would spend together. The boy Arthur stood by the side of the road that led out of the forest. Looking over his shoulder, he searched for Merlin's glade, but it was no longer there. A thick patch of woods had grown overnight, swallowing up the glade and with it the opening to the crystal cave. Arthur felt a pang knowing that this loss would be felt by all mortals, not just himself.



“I won’t be coming back, will I?” he asked. Merlin, who was standing by his side, shook his head.

“No need to. You are done with me.”

I doubt that I’ll ever be done with you, Arthur thought. It seemed that even after all his years of training, there was more left to ask his teacher than the day they began. Reading his mind, the wizard said, “I wanted to give you a parting gift, and I could think of nothing better than this.” He pointed to the road beneath their feet, which had also appeared overnight. “Roads are the sign of the wizard. Or did you know that?”

“No.”

“Then remember what I say. A wizard is one who teaches by walking away, and when you can walk away yourself, you will be a wizard. Although you may fancy that you own a part of this earth, in fact you only walk it. In spirit you are the dust on the road, the restlessness in the wind. You mortals build homes to protect yourself from the world. To a wizard home is this moment, and moments are always moving –“

“On the road of time,” Arthur said, finishing the sentence for him. He knew much of what Merlin had to teach by heart.

“Yes,” Merlin agreed. They both fell silent. The boy glanced out of the corner of his eye to see if Merlin was saddened, or at least bemused, by their parting. He was neither.

“I see you don’t quite believe me,” Merlin said. “But walking away from me really is the greatest gift I can bestow upon you.” And with that the boy’s unwilling feet started to move. There was a bend in the road a hundred yards away, and every step Arthur took toward it seemed to change him a little. The years he had spent with Merlin began to fade into a dream, while his curiosity about the world increased.

